FREE ALBUM!
20-TRACK earMUSIC SAMPLER

Featuring Marillion, Jean-Luc Ponty, Copeland, King, Cosma & Belew, Saga, Mark Kelly's Marathon and more ...

PROG

THE FLOWER KINGS
"When we do progressive rock, there's no rules."

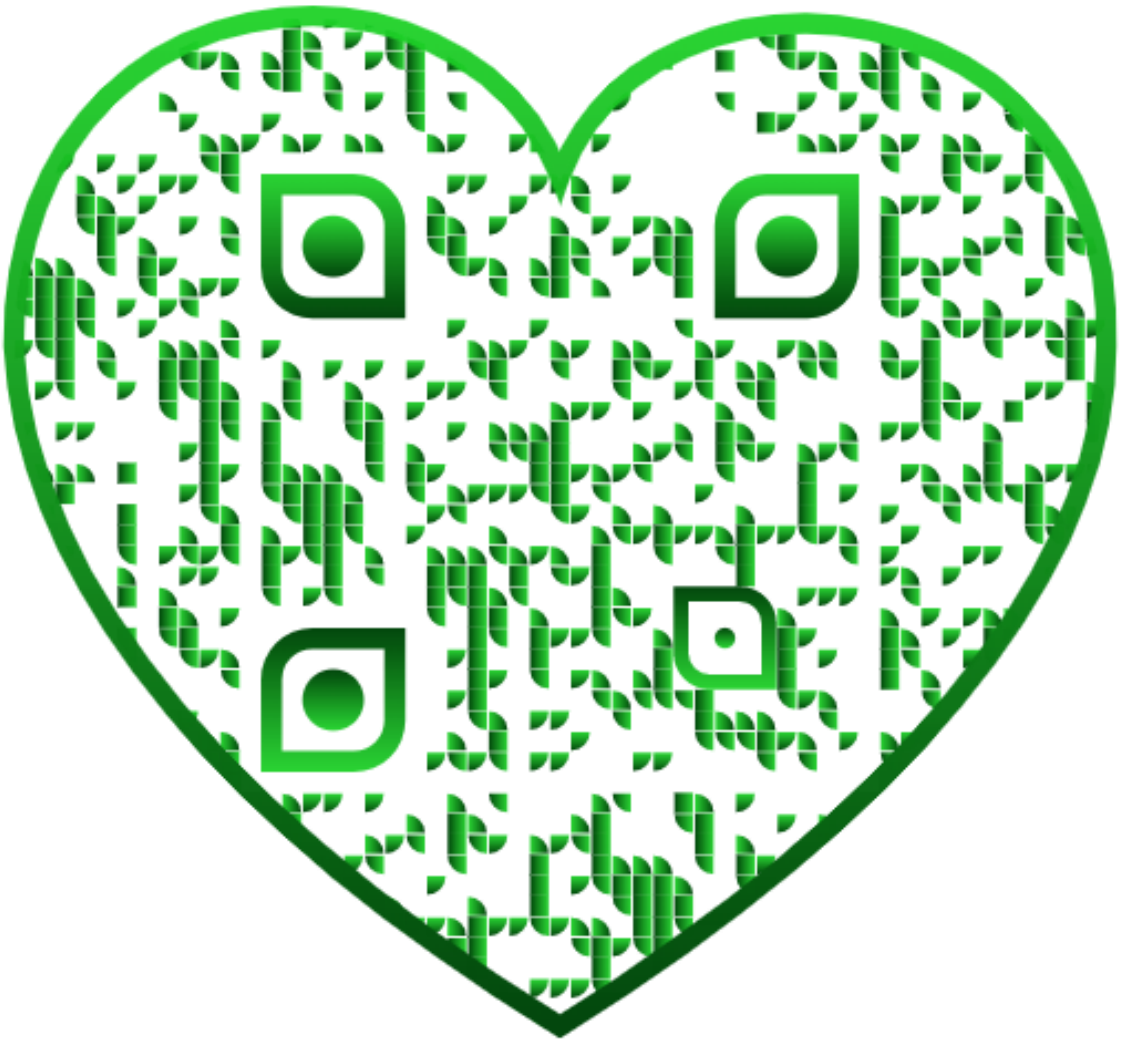
ARJEN LUCASSEN
Sci-fi movies and prog metal collide on new Star One album

STEELEYE SPAN
"Playing to 18,000 people with Jethro Tull was terrifying!"

FUTURE
PROG 127

MARILLION

Exclusive! Inside the making of *An Hour Before It's Dark*



SJS release 2nd album 'The Unlikely Event'

The Unlikely Event

Early reactions:

thearts desk.com ★★★★★

"Effulgent meltdown epic number two from the Aussie neo-prog combo."

PROG CRITIQUE ★★★★½

"Exudes grace, density and emotion."

PROG ARCHIVES ★★★★½

"Can't recommend this one enough."

Available on all streaming platforms
Download: sjs-music.bandcamp.com
Website: sjs.staw.mn

ISSUE 127 04.02.22

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IF IT'S IN THERE IT'S ON HERE

ANNE-MARIE FORKER

COVER FEATURE

"I'm just saying to people, 'Do something positive for the world.'"

Marillion p28

How Marillion found new hope with *An Hour Before It's Dark*...

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Q&A pg 26
10cc mainstay Graham Gouldman offers an insight into his stellar songwriting and discusses the upcoming 10cc Greatest Hits tour.

THE PROG INTERVIEW pg 88
Maddy Prior has fronted folk/rock/prog outfit Steeleye Span since they formed in 1969 and looks back over a career that's also seen her work with David Bowie, Ian Anderson and Status Quo.

PRESS/STEELEYE SPAN/P SILVER

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Marillion's evocative *An Hour Before It's Dark* takes top billing, and there are also reviews from Peter Hammill, Gong, Alan Parsons, Gavin Harrison, Clive Mitten, Fields, Tears For Fears, David Cross & Andrew Keeling, Rosalie Cunningham, Amorphis, Spirit, Dave Bainbridge, The Flower Kings, Black Country, New Road, Loop, Tame Impala, Orphaned Land and more...

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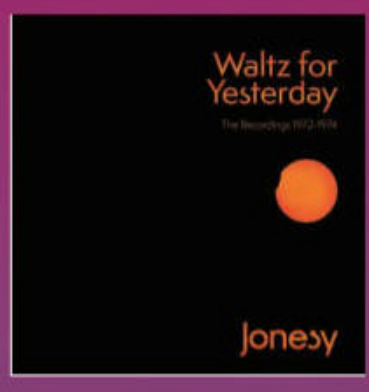
Irish-French prog rock? It's a thing and it's really rather good too...

FIELDS
'FEELING FREE – THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS 1971-1973'
(2 CD EDITION)

- This new two disc remastered anthology draws together both of these classic albums and also adds studio out-takes, later demos and a previously unreleased BBC Radio One Sounds of The '70s session recorded in December 1971.
- It also features an illustrated booklet with an essay.

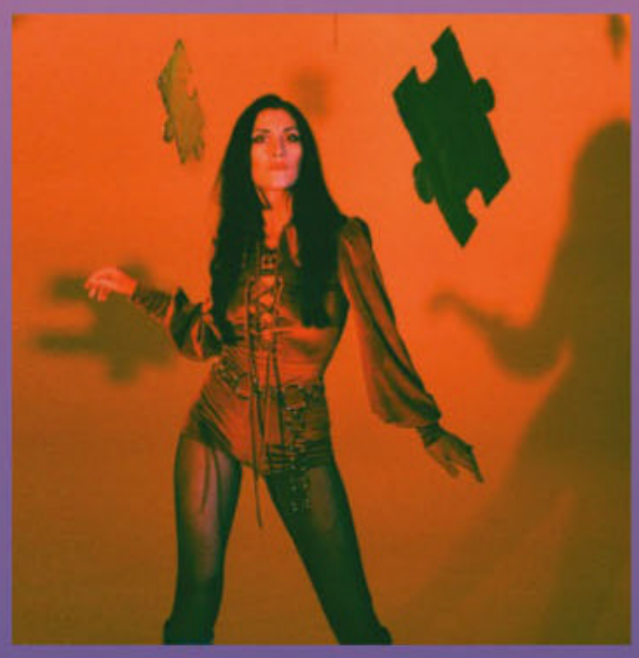
SPIRIT
'TWELVE DREAMS OF DR SARDONICUS'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED 2CD EDITION)

- A new expanded newly remastered 2cd edition of the classic 1970 album by Spirit. Featuring 11 bonus tracks and a additional bonus 17-track cd of previously unreleased material recorded at the Fillmore West, San Francisco in May 1970 and the Boston Tea Party in October 1970.



JONESY
'WALTZ FOR YESTERDAY – THE RECORDINGS 1972-1974'
(3CD CLAMSHELL BOX SET)

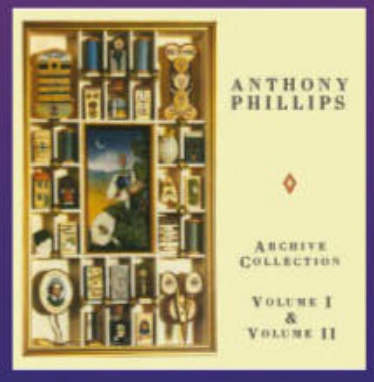
- Jonesy's the third album, 'Growing', was produced by Rupert Hine and released to great acclaim in November 1973 receiving the Montreux Diamond Award as the top rock/pop album of the year in early 1974. Despite such a positive critical response, the band departed Dawn Records. John and Trevor formed a new line-up of Jonesy with Bernard Hagley (electric saxes and flute), David Potts (drums) and Ken Elliott (keyboards) and returned to the studio to record a final album, 'Sudden Prayers Make God Jump'. The album was one of the band's finest, but due to issues with management, it failed to gain a release. The recordings first appeared in 2003, sourced from a cassette tape, but in 2021 the original master recordings were located and have been remastered for this collection.



ROSALIE CUNNINGHAM
'TWO PIECE PUZZLE'
(CD EDITION)

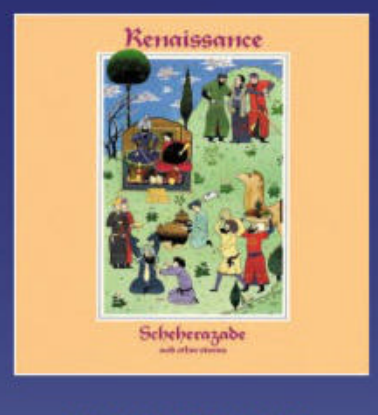
- Esoteric Antenna is delighted to announce the release of the wonderful new studio album by Rosalie Cunningham. After her celebrated band Purson played its final gig in late 2016, singer/songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Rosalie branched out into a successful solo career. Her self-titled debut album issued in 2019 was acclaimed by both critics and fans.

Release Date 25th February 2022



ANTHONY PHILLIPS
'ARCHIVE COLLECTION VOLUME I & II'
(5CD REMASTERED BOX SET)

- Esoteric Recordings releases of a newly remastered 5CD clamshell boxed set comprising the two original 'Archive Collection' albums by celebrated composer and Genesis founder member Anthony Phillips.
- This new set features liner notes by Jon Dann and is a fine collection of music by one of Britain's most imaginative and respected musicians. It is sure to appeal to aficionados of Anthony Phillips' highly respected work.



BLOSSOM TOES

'WE ARE EVER SO CLEAN'
(3CD REMASTERED & EXPANDED SET)

- Sadly overlooked at the time of its release, 'We Are Ever So Clean' is now regarded as one of the greatest psychedelic rock albums ever made.
- This expanded Esoteric Recordings edition has been newly remastered and features 27 additional bonus tracks drawn from a live performance in Stockholm in August 1967, rare singles, demos and BBC sessions. The set fully restores the original album artwork and features a booklet with an essay featuring exclusive interviews with Brian Godding and Jim Cregan.

'IF ONLY FOR A MOMENT'
(3CD EDITION)

- This expanded Esoteric Recordings edition has been newly remastered and features 20 additional bonus tracks drawn from rare demos and out-takes plus live performances in Belgium in 1969, including a live set from the Amougies Festival from October '69 where the band was joined on stage by Frank Zappa for the track 'Grooving'.
- The set fully restores the original album artwork and features a booklet with an essay featuring exclusive interviews.

ELIAS HULK
'UNCHAINED'
(CD EDITION)

- Newly remastered edition of the classic 1970 album by the UK Progressive/Hard Rock band Elias Hulk. Hailing from Bournemouth, Elias Hulk formed in 1969 and featured Peter Thorpe (lead vocals), Neil Tatum (lead guitar), Granville Frazer (rhythm guitar), James Haines (bass) and Bernard James (drums). This set features an illustrated booklet with a new essay and marks a welcome return to CD for this classic album.

RENAISSANCE
'SCHEHERAZADE & OTHER STORIES'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED 3CD BOX SET)

- This expanded edition of Scheherazade & Other Stories has been newly re-mastered from the original first-generation master tapes and also features a stunning 5.1 Surround Sound up-mix on a DVD (NTSC / Region Free) which also includes a high resolution stereo mix and a wonderful bonus feature of a previously unreleased 1976 live promotional film. The set also includes a bonus CD of a concert recorded in January 1976 in Nottingham, England and a previously unreleased bonus track. The release also features an illustrated booklet with a new essay featuring exclusive interviews.

Esoteric Recordings Remastering and Expanding the Classics

ESOTERIC RECORDINGS CHERRY RED RECORDS
www.esotericrecordings.com

kscope

tangerine dream

Thorsten Quaeschning, Hoshiko Yamane and Paul Frick

Available on CD / heavyweight vinyl 2LP / digital

Also available Probe 6-8 EP

raum

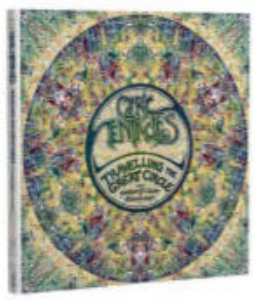
THE NEW STUDIO ALBUM

The band's second studio album since the passing of Edgar Froese in 2015. With deep respect for the sound of the previous five decades, this record continues in the ever- evolving pathway of Tangerine Dream.

CD / gatefold double LP / digital

25th February

FROM VIRGIN TO QUANTUM YEARS TOUR- MARCH 2022	
2nd BELFAST - Limelight 1	13th BIRMINGHAM - Town Hall
3rd DUBLIN - Liberty Hall	15th LEEDS - Brudenell Social Club
5th MANCHESTER - RNCM Theatre	16th BRISTOL - Trinity Centre
6th EDINBURGH - Assembly Rooms	17th EXETER - Phoenix
7th GLASGOW - Saint Luke's	18th LONDON - Roundhouse
9th NEWCASTLE - Riverside Newcastle	19th GREAT YARMOUTH, HRH Prog XII
10th LIVERPOOL - Grand Central	21st SOUTHAMPTON - Engine Rooms
11th COVENTRY - Coventry Cathedral	23rd BRIGHTON – Chalk
12th CAMBRIDGE - Corn Exchange	



Ozric Tentacles

Travelling the Great Circle

8 Disc (7CD + DVD), 80-page Hardback Book, offering for the first time, an in depth view into one of the Ozric Tentacles most intensely creative spells.

Containing the first four official studio albums, along with three bonus discs featuring ***'Demos & Rarities'***, ***'Live Underslunky'*** & ***'Remixes'*** all remastered by Ed Wynne, and ***Live at the Fridge, Brixton, 1991*** on DVD.

OUT NOW

Gavin Harrison

Sanity & Gravity

2021 remaster of the 1997 album with new bonus track.

Features performances from a stellar line-up including Gary Sanctuary, Mick Karn, Sultan Khan, Richard Barbieri, Jakko Jakszyk and Dave Stewart.
With new artwork from Carl Glover

CD / LP/ digital

OUT NOW

Gong *Pulsing Signals*

New 2CD / 2LP concert release from the vanguards of 20th century psychedelic music

Capturing the band in scintillating form on the 2019 ***The Universe Also Collapses*** tour

18th February 2CD & digitally
22nd March Gatefold double LP

Tim Bowness / Giancarlo Erra

Memories of Machines

10th anniversary expanded edition of Tim Bowness and Giancarlo Erra's 2011 album ***Warm Winter***, now issued as ***Memories of Machines***.

Features guests Robert Fripp, Peter Hammill, Julianne Regan, Jim Matheos, Colin Edwin & more.

CD+DVD (hires stereo 24/48, surround Dolby Digital and DTS 96/24, and surround LPCM 24/48) / gatefold 2LP / digital

25th February

ENVY OF NONE

A new band and a new album of dark, cinematic alt. rock from

ALEX LIFESON ANDY CURRAN
MAIAH WYNNE ALF ANNIBALINI

8TH APRIL 2022

CD / LP - black + ltd ed white coloured vinyl / digital / Ltd Ed Special edition presented in a gatefold sleeve with a blue coloured vinyl LP, 2 CDs including a 5 track bonus disc, 28 page Booklet with exclusive content

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PROG PRESENTS...

Discovering

e·a·r MUSIC

MPS

Located in Hamburg, Germany, earMUSIC is Edel Music & Entertainment's international record company dedicated to the genres of rock, pop, metal and alternative rock.

This exclusive *Prog* sampler gives a deep insight into the breadth and quality of earMUSIC's multifaceted roster and releases. It includes brand new songs, classics, deep cuts as well as releases from its jazz label MPS, Germany's oldest jazz label with the most perfect sound.

PRESS/ANNE-MARIE FORKER

Cover stars, Marillion, open the earMUSIC sampler.

How to download your free digital sampler from earMUSIC

1. Visit www.ear-music.net/progsampler – type it straight into your browser.
2. Enter your email address and subscribe to the earMUSIC newsletter.
3. You will receive a newsletter #1 asking you to confirm the subscription.
4. You will receive a newsletter #2 including the download link for your free digital sampler.
5. Enjoy your new music!

Discover earMUSIC's entire catalogue and roster by visiting www.ear-music.net and www.mps-music.com.

What's on your free earMUSIC/MPS sampler digital album.
Download the 20-track sampler from www.ear-music.net/progsampler

1 Marillion
Be Hard On Yourself
Taken from the upcoming album, *An Hour Before It's Dark*

2 Joe Satriani
Sahara
Taken from the upcoming album, *The Elephants Of Mars*

3 Outlanders
Closer To The Sky
(Tarja Turunen & Torsten Stenzel) feat Trevor Rabin
Taken from the single *Closer To The Sky*

4 Marathon
Amelia (i) Shoreline, (ii) Whistling At The Sea, (iii) 13 Bones
Taken from *Mark Kelly's Marathon*

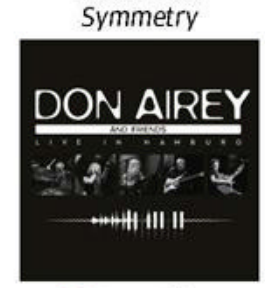
5 Deep Purple
Man Alive
Taken from *Whoosh!*

6 Saga
Tired World - Chapter 6
Taken from *Symmetry*

7 Stratovarius
Castles In The Sky
Taken from *Nemesis*

8 Myrath
Dance
Taken from *Shehili*

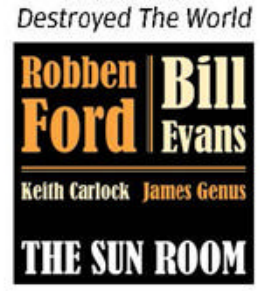
9 Generation Axe
Bad Horsie
Taken from *Generation Axe: Guitars That Destroyed The World*



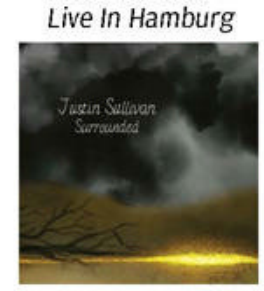
10 Don Airey
Desperado
Taken from *Don Airey And Friends: Live In Hamburg*

11 Copeland, King, Cosma & Belew
Darkness
Taken from *Gizmodrome Live*

12 Blackmore's Night
Second Element
Taken from *Nature's Light*



13 Robben Ford & Bill Evans
Big Mama
Taken from *The Sun Room*

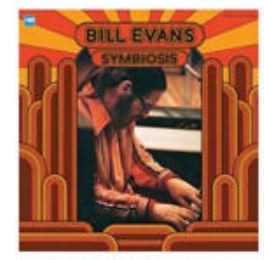


14 Justin Sullivan
Sao Paulo
Taken from *Surrounded*

15 The The
Global Eyes
Taken from *The Comeback Special*

16 Alice Cooper
The Sound Of A
Taken from *Paranormal*

17 George Duke
Love
Taken from *Feel*



18 Bill Evans
Symbiosis, 1st Movement: Moderato
Taken from *Symbiosis*

19 Alphonse Mouzon
Nightmare
Taken from *In Search Of A Dream*

20 Jean-Luc Ponty
Sunday Walk
Taken from *Sunday Walk*

Ed's Letter

Spotify

Stream the Prog 127 playlist at www.spoti.fi/3rDjcGS

Hello, and welcome to the new issue of *Prog*. A new Marillion album is always cause for celebration, especially when it's as good as *An Hour Before It's Dark*. The general consensus from the *Prog* team is that once again the band have surpassed themselves. Dave Everley goes deep into the making of the album for our cover feature on page 28. We also bring you an exclusive extract from Mark Kelly's new autobiography (page 36) that looks at how he and the band devised their crowdfunding approach to releasing music, the system that also helped the band hit the road at the end of last year amid continued Covid confusion.

I hope you enjoy the 20-track earMUSIC digital sampler (see page 7), which also features our cover stars along with a splendid selection of prog and progressively minded music on the label. We're hoping these label samplers will become a constant as we transition from no longer featuring a physical CD.

Talking of which, thank you to everyone who has thus far emailed in about the CD. Not everyone was happy, and we knew that would be the case, but for the most part, your letters were fair and polite and people raised some interesting ideas, all of which we are currently looking into. By next issue we should have a plan in place to continue to highlight the grass roots of prog bands as well. Also, we've long been creating a playlist to cover the bands in the new issue, which is featured on our social media channels. As of this issue we're including the link on this page too, so hopefully more of you can enjoy that.

At the end of the day we are, and always have been, a magazine, dedicated to bringing you the very best coverage of the entire progressive music spectrum. That is what we've always strived to do and what we always will do.

So please enjoy issue 127 of *Prog*. Take care of yourselves, and we'll see you with issue 128 on March 11. Prog on...

Jerry Ewing – Editor

You can subscribe to *Prog* at www.magazinesdirect.com. See page 112 for further details.

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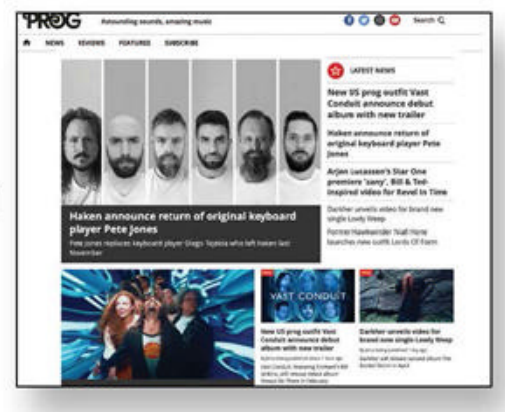
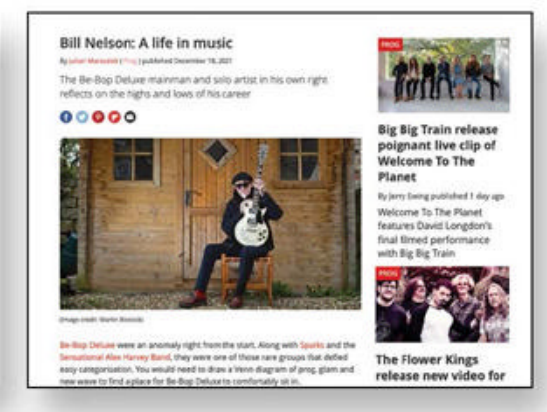




Arjen Anthony Lucassen's

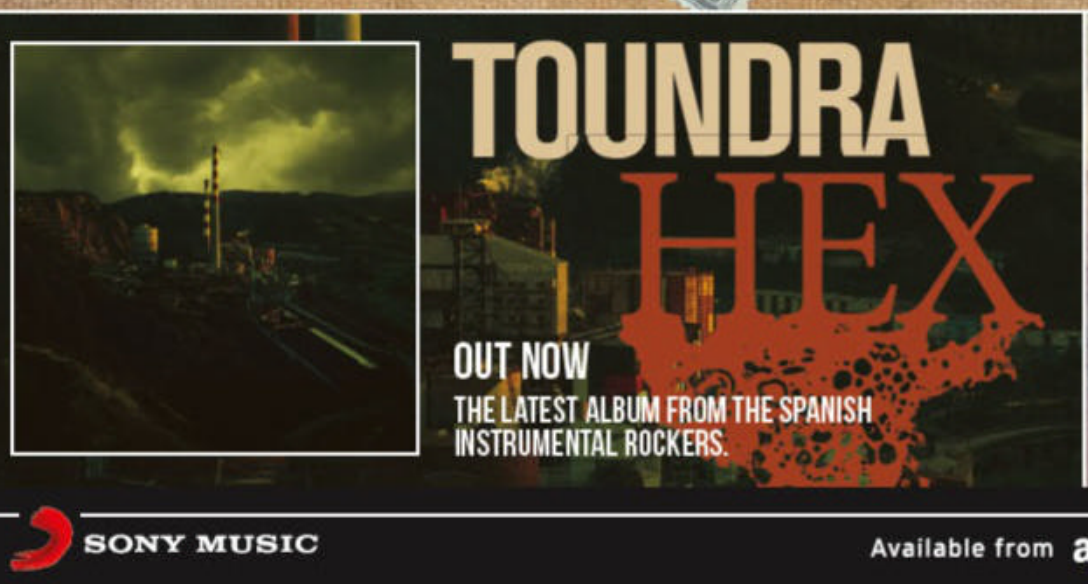
Star One

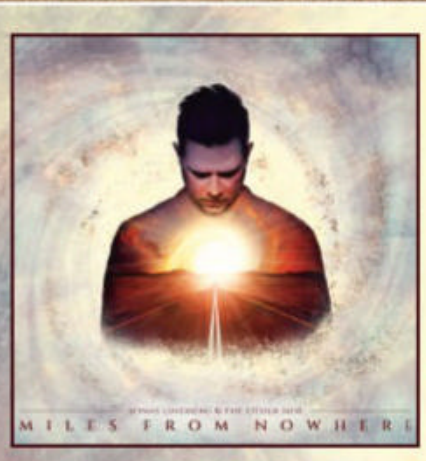
REVEL IN TIME

In Stores 18th February 2022

After 10 years **Arjen Lucassen** returns with his progressive metal project Star One, featuring over 30 mind-boggling guest musicians including **Ross Jennings** (Haken), **Michael Romeo** (Symphony X), **Jeff Scott Soto** (Sons of Apollo), **Steve Vai** & more!

Available as a Limited Deluxe 3CD+Blu-ray Artbook including 5.1 mix, instrumentals & more. Also available as 2CD Digipak, Gatefold 2LP + CD & as Digital Album.





JONAS LINDBERG
& THE OTHER SIDE

MILES FROM NOWHERE

In Stores 18th February 2022

The Swedish multi-instrumentalist returns with a new album featuring stunning guitar solos, intense drums, folky melodies & a 25-minute epic. Features a guest spot from Roine Stolt (The Flower Kings).

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Bloody Well Write

Send your letters to us at: *Prog*, Future Publishing, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JR, or email prog@futurenet.com. Letters may be edited for length. We regret that we cannot reply to phone calls. For more comment and prog news and views, find us on facebook.com under *Prog*.

BURNING BRIGHT

I've been reading [*Prog* Editor Jerry Ewing's work] for decades, just as I did with the late Malcolm Dome.

I am old enough to have grown up reading (I would say, devouring) *Kerrang!* since its first, historic issue (June 6, 1981 — those were the days...). And those unforgettable pages formed and increased our passion for rock music. I therefore remember this extraordinary journalist and writer, one of the most influential and charismatic experts, connoisseurs and lovers of music that the UK has ever given birth to, with the memory of his lightning reviews that — in the minds of many young people of the time — unleashed the craving for hunting and discovering new records, [and] new or unknown bands worth listening to.

His articles, his reviews, his appearances on many rock music videos or DVDs are still inspiring and [his passion for music is] contagious.

With great sadness, I read Malcolm's latest review of the ELP box set *Out Of This World Live (1970-1997)* in *Prog* 125 and paid my personal tribute to one of our masters, with a pint of India Pale Ale, which, however, does not wash away the great loss.

I thank you and I wish you to continue in the footsteps of the great master, with ever more passion and determination.

Gian Paolo Pelizzaro, Rome, Italy

SO LONG (AND THANK YOU)

One of the first editions of *Prog* I bought had a song called *Judas Unrepentant* on it by some band by the name of Big Big Train. I'd never come across them but bought *English Electric* on the strength of that one song on a free CD. That opened the BBT door for me (sorry, bad pun).

I had a tear in my eye as I read the tribute to David Longdon in *Prog* 126. I was lucky enough to see the band live in Edinburgh a few years back. They were simply brilliant and quite obviously a band enjoying what they were doing. David appeared to epitomise that joy, that night onstage.

I didn't know him, never met him, but I felt immensely sad at his passing. Thank you for your touching tribute and all my very best wishes to David's family and friends.

Graeme Waugh, Livingston, Scotland

Touching tribute: the late David Longdon from Big Big Train.

PRESS: BIG BIG TRAIN/ SOPHOCLES ALEXIOU

AFRICAN DREAM

At 65, I have been a fan of progressive rock since I was 20. So what's the big deal here? Most of the readers of the magazine are in the same boat. Except that I am an African, residing in my original country of Nigeria, in the northern part of the country, and a Muslim. Blame *Melody Maker*, *Sounds* and *New Musical Express*. These British rock bibles were freely available to us in the 1970s in Kano city. A full-page advert of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* in *Sounds* in 1973 triggered the desire. The radios here played only soul, funk, jazz — the usual setlist for African audiences — but John Peel on BBC World Service introduced me to the prog scene — and everything wacky in between. Pink Floyd became an early, and all-time favourite, followed by Yes, ELP, King Crimson, Jethro Tull, Gentle Giant, Van der Graaf Generator, Rush and the other usual suspects. I even had a chance to watch Tangerine Dream and Klaus

TWEET TALK

Follow us on twitter.com/progmagazineUK

SEÁN ONO LENNON
@seanonolennon
I propose we officially discount the last two years. We should all be allowed to legally change our age to what it was when Covid began, (and not begin counting again til it's over).

STEVE HACKETT

STEVE HACKETT
@HackettOfficial
It was great to connect with pals Nick Beggs, Steve Rothery and Jakko Jakszyk, watching the Cirque du Soleil at the Royal Albert Hall last night

LETTER

Two things really struck me while reading *Prog* 125: the references to ABC's *4 Ever 2 Gether* and Coldplay's *Coloratura*. Before fellow readers start rolling their eyes in despair, these references are a timely reminder that we should never underestimate the influence that prog has had over many 'pop' artists. It's one of the highest compliments that can be paid by fellow musicians. ABC's debut is one of my favourite albums from the 1980s and being produced by Trevor Horn provides an obvious prog link. The prog influence in the structure of this particular song is definitely there.

And as for Coldplay, the closing song on their latest album is for me the most remarkable composition of 2021 (Steven Wilson's *Follower* a close second). It's easy to discard anything that doesn't have at least one change of time and/or key signature in it, just as it's easy to dismiss a 'pop' band for being, well, pop. Along with one of my closest friends and fellow prog lover, we've followed Level 42 right from the start of their career. Eyebrows were raised by other prog friends. But listen to some of their work and you'll find more prog influence than you'd imagine.

Nick Hodgson, via email

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from The Merch Desk at www.themerchdesk.com.

Schulze live — as usual, giving a splash of colour in the audience!

A dream come true was being a student at Chelsea College, University of London, from 1981-1983, along Kings Road. From 1985-1988 I was doing my DPhil at Sussex University, Brighton.

I was there when Tommy Vance gave Marillion the first big break on The Friday Rock Show (and taped two years' worth). I grabbed a chance to attend a free Marillion *Script*-era concert at Chelsea College hall. I will never forget Fish — huge, imposing with painted face; nor will he ever forget me, for while he was warbling *Three Boats Down From The Candy* he sighted me standing in the audience, and I swear he missed a line! I was the only Black face there!

While the prog scene moved on, I fear I remained rooted in its 'golden era', and missed a lot of the 'neos' that came along. I was fine with the 'P's — Pendragon, Pentangle, Pallas, but completely missed Porcupine Tree, etc. and what I call Euro-neos (but later, through Bandcamp, discovered Airbag, PFM, The Flower Kings, etc.). I discovered that my love for metal and prog have been fused into a new genre by the likes of Dream Theater. Cool or what?

I discovered *Prog* on a visit to London some three years ago and have never missed a copy. I am now a professor of information and media studies and one of the very few professors of popular culture in northern Nigerian universities — indeed I established the field and gloriously hark back to the golden era of prog to the absolute bewilderment of my classes — filled with Gen Z'ers rooted in rap.

Thanks, *Prog*, for keeping the flag flying with a mixture of the old and new — keeping this old Black hippie happy!

Abdalla Uba Adamu, Kano, Nigeria

FAREWELL TO THE COVER CD

I felt I had to contact you regarding the loss of the covermount CD. I completely understand why you had to do this but it's a great loss as far as I'm concerned as it has introduced me to so many bands and musicians I didn't know existed. I've also bought lots of music as a result of listening to it as well, and I'll no longer be able to do this.

I intend to carry on buying *Prog* magazine for as long as it is published, so if you are ever able to include a CD in future, you'll make me and I'm sure lots of other people very happy.

Andrew Colston, Boston, Lincs

AND GOOD RIDDANCE!

I won't miss the CD — and I am glad it is going from an environmental perspective. Although I still buy and play CDs, I try out new music on the web. Maybe the CD could be replaced by you sharing a monthly playlist of new music that you have curated, available as an article or even just a link on the *Prog* website? I'm not bothered either by card inserts or calendars — I'd rather our subs be spent on journalism/magazine content.

Finally, I really enjoy the end of year lists. Sometimes the amount of new music can be overwhelming and these seem a good way to find out what is worth investigating that I may have missed. The more you can signpost readers as to what you think is really good would help (eg. lovers of x will like y)?

Karl Wilding, via email

This is just a selection of the messages we've received about our cover CD — thank you to everyone who took the time to write in. We hope you all enjoy this month's free earMUSIC digital sampler, which you can find on page 7. There's more new music on page 8, where you can find details of this issue's Spotify playlist. — Dep Ed.

JOHN MITCHELL
@LordConnaught
Frosty on the drive today

JOHN MITCHELL

ALAN REED
@3hobbits
New song from Alex Lifeson's post-Rush band. Love it. Lyrics seem oddly appropriate too

FIELD MUSIC
@fieldmusicmusic
Most writers will spend years working on things for which they never receive ANY remuneration. If people are still buying or listening to my songs in twenty years, I bloody well hope I'll get paid for it.

PROG

Future PLC, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JR
Email prog@futurenet.com
twitter.com/ProgMagazineUK
instagram.com/progmagazine
You can also find us on **facebook.com** under Prog

Editorial
Editor **Jerry Ewing**
Deputy Editor **Natasha Scharf**
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Contributors
Jeremy Allen (JA), Joe Banks (JB), Mike Barnes (MB), Jordan Blum (JMB), Chris Cope (CC), Stephen Dalton (SD), Isere Lloyd-Davis (ILD), Malcolm Dome (MD), Daryl Easlea (DE), Dave Everley (DEV), Ian Fortnam (IF), Polly Glass (PG), Eleanor Goodman (EG), Nick Holmes [NH], Rob Hughes (RH), Will Ireland (WI), Emma Johnston (EJ), Jo Kendall (JK), Hannah May Kilroy (HMK), Dom Lawson (DL), Fraser Lewry (FL), Dannii Leivers (DLE), Dave Ling (DML), Alex Lynham (AL), Gary Mackenzie (GMM), Emily MacNevin (EM), Rhodri Marsden (RHM), Julian Marszalek (JM), Giulia Mascheroni (GMA), Chris McGarel (CMG), Kris Needs (KN), Kevin Nixon (KNI), Alison Reijman (AR), Chris Roberts (CR), Paul Sexton (PS), Johnny Sharp (JS), Nick Shilton (NS), Sid Smith (SS), Francesca Tyer (FT), Rick Wakeman (RW), Phil Weller (POW), David West (DW), Philip Wilding (PW), Rich Wilson (RW), Holly Wright (HW)

Cover image
Image: **Marillion Press/Anne-Marie Forker**
Cover Manipulation: **MagicTorch**

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Manager **Helen Hughes**
helen.hughes@futurenet.com
Account Director **Steven Pyatt**
steve.pyatt@futurenet.com

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Email enquiries **help@magazinesdirect.com**
CRM Director **Louise Dudfield**

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance, Tom Reynolds**
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INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

ALEX LIFESON BACK WITH ENVY OF NONE

Rush guitarist re-enters the musical fray, and challenges himself, with new quartet – debut album due in April.

Rush star Alex Lifeson returns this year with new four-piece band, Envy Of None. Released on April 8 via Kscope, the group's eponymous debut album sees the guitar hero team up with Andy Curran (founder of veteran Canadian rockers Coney Hatch), producer and musician Alfio 'Alf' Annibalini, and upcoming US singer, songwriter and instrumentalist, Maiah Wynne.

The 25 year-old vocalist is central to the project, which is billed as featuring "various shades of alternative, experimental and synth rock" and "twisting dark melodies against contemporary pop hooks". Their music marks a stylistic shift for Lifeson, into a more experimental, almost left-field prog sound. In January the launch single *Liar* set the tone for the project, which has been nearly five years in the making.

"Andy and I have known each other since the 80s," Lifeson tells *Prog*, "through our bands, and management representation. He joined our management company [Anthem] as our A&R guy and spent many years on the road with Rush, where we truly cemented a close relationship."

Curran began working on the ideas that made it to *Envy Of None* with long-term production partner Annibalini, but the band began taking shape in 2016, when Curran met Portland-based performer Wynne. She had won a songwriting contest for which one of her prizes was a 'mentorship Zoom call' with him.

"We really clicked," Wynne says, "talking about this style of darker music, and Andy brought up that he had been working on some similar music on his own. He sent me [the song] *Shadow* and we had a really good cohesion sending files back and forth, just for the love of the music."

Envy Of None was originally intended as a four-track EP, but such was the creative dynamic that it grew into a full, 11-track LP. Lifeson was inspired by Wynne's ethereal vocal style, describing her as "really fucking special".

He adds that "Alf and Andy did most of the preliminary work, and when Andy asked me to be involved, I was very impressed by the guitar work Alf created. It allowed me to be more explorative in the construction of my arrangements and attitude. Four years later, we are on the cusp of releasing an album that we've come to love very much."

The release will come just over two years since the tragic death of Lifeson's friend and bandmate, Neil Peart. The drum great's passing brought Rush's imperious career to a close, and

Alex Lifeson joins Envy Of None's Maiah Wynne (left), Andy Curran (bottom left) and (below) Alfio Annibalini.

"We're on the cusp of releasing an album we love very much."

Envy Of None pay tribute to him with the song *Western Sunset*, which Lifeson wrote in his honour. "I visited Neil when he was ill," he revealed in the band's press release. "I was on his balcony watching the sunset and found inspiration. There's a finality about a sunset that stayed with me throughout the whole process. It had meaning. It was the perfect mood to decompress after all these different textures, a nice way to close the book."

Of the band's future, Wynne tells us "there has been some consideration of a couple of special live shows, depending on how everyone feels. I like to think we will be making more music together and possibly another album.

"We put together some bonus tracks for this record at the last minute, and they turned out great. I can't wait to see how the music evolves and what we do next. It really feels like this could go any direction, and that's what makes it so exciting to me. I just love making music with these guys."

Envy Of None will be available on digital, CD and vinyl formats. The limited edition deluxe version features a gatefold sleeve, blue vinyl LP and double CD with five-track bonus disc and 28-page booklet with exclusive content.

For pre-orders see www.eon.lnk.to/envyofnone. For more information, visit www.facebook.com/envyofnone. **GRM**

PRESS/ JADEN D, RICHARD SIBBALD, TROY WILLIAM DUNN

This month, Intro was compiled by

Dave Everley
Jerry Ewing
Martin Kielty
Isère Lloyd-Davis
Alex Lynham
Emily MacNevin
Rhodri Marsden
Grant Moon
Alison Reijman
Natasha Scharf

COHEED'S AMORY WARS RAGE ON!

Claudio Sanchez's sci-fi proggers return with US tour in February and new LP in May.

PRESS/ ALEXANDRA_GAVILLET

***Vaxis* powers: Coheed And Cambria.**

Deep-concept prog rockers Coheed And Cambria will release their highly anticipated 10th album on May 27. They've also announced a tour of US clubs for February.

Available on Roadrunner, *Vaxis II: A Window Of The Waking Mind* has been produced by the band's linchpin Claudio Sanchez and alt-rock producer Zakk Cervini. Among the 13 tracks are current singles *Shoulders* and *Rise, Naianasha (Cut The Cord)*.

The follow-up to 2018's *Vaxis I: The Unheavenly Creatures*, the album is another deep dive into the New York band's own sci-fi lore. Billed as the next episode of their ongoing 'Amory Wars' saga, it will be "the second part of the five-part 'Vaxis' arc about a couple on the run from tyrannical forces and their mysterious new addition."

As well as being available on the usual formats, *Vaxis II* comes as a limited edition deluxe box set featuring *A Window Of The Waking Mind* – an illustrated hardcover novel conceived by Sanchez and written by his wife Chondra Echert. Also in the box are a 'Quintillan Speaker Containment Unit Lamp' (a combined light and speaker on an Amory Wars theme), plus posters, a certificate of authenticity and fan entitlements, such as early access to their upcoming shows.

Coheed will be supported by Philadelphia rockers Sheer Mag on their 23-date The Great Destroyer Tour, which opens on February 16 in Pioneertown, California and ends in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on March 19. For tickets and more information on *Vaxis II*, visit www.coheedandcambria.com. **GRM**

TALK TALK ARTISTS LINE UP FOR HELD BY TREES' DEBUT.

Guests abound on the new project's first album, *Solace*.

New instrumental project Held By Trees release their debut album, *Solace*, on April 22 via Tweed Jacket Music. Helmed by Bournemouth producer, composer and musician David Joseph, the record features seven artists who made significant contributions to the music of Talk Talk and its leader, the late Mark Hollis.

These include guitarist Robbie McIntosh, drummer Martin Ditcham, pianist Laurence Pendrous, bassist Simon Edwards and woodwind maestro Andreas Payani. *Solace* was mixed by Phill Brown (who worked on Talk Talk's 1988 classic *Spirit Of Eden*), and mastered by veteran engineer Denis Blackman.

"This whole project is a testimony to the warmth and openness of the British rock fraternity," says Joseph, who has also recruited other first-call artists including guitarist Tim Renwick (Pink Floyd, David Bowie), blues icon Eric Bibb and Dire Straits co-founder David Knopfler. We'll have a Limelight on this fascinating project soon. See www.bit.ly/heldbytrees for more. **GRM**

Barking up the right Tree: David Joseph.

PRESS

THE FIERCE AND THE DEAD GET VOCAL!

Bassist Kevin Feazey to sing on 'psychedelic' fourth album, *News From The Invisible World*.

PRESS/ASHLEY JONES

TFATD: They seem to have an *Invisible* touch...

The Fierce And The Dead's fourth full-length album, *News From The Invisible World*, will be released later this year. The proggers' follow-up to their acclaimed 2018 record *The Euphoric* will be the first on their own imprint, Spencer Park Music, and their first to feature vocals, from bassist Kevin Feazey.

"Every album has been different from the last," Feazey tells *Prog*. "We've never felt that we should or shouldn't do something, and the new material is taking in sounds and influences that take us further into uncharted territory."

Feazey, guitarist Matt Stevens and drummer Stuart Marshall have known each other since they were kids growing up in Northampton, with Feazey singing in their various bands together before The Fierce And The Dead emerged as a powerhouse instrumental unit in 2010.

With half of its tracks with vocals and half without, *News From The Invisible World* takes its name from an 1844 occult book, which is an anthology of 'authenticated accounts of apparitions, ghosts, spectres, dreams and visions', but the album deals with more familiar, topical issues. "There are these virtual, invisible worlds online," says Stevens, "where people believe daft stuff like Q-Anon and all that nonsense. They live based on their own preconceptions and look for the evidence to support their worldview. We're fairly political and outspoken on our socials, but Kev's kept the actual lyrics open to interpretation."

While co-guitarist Steve Cleaton has been well, both Feazey and Marshall caught Covid during production, and Stevens fell and fractured his elbow late last year. He's only just able to play guitar again, and is finishing his parts.

The band's relations with previous label Bad Elephant Music remain excellent, but they've launched Spencer Park as part of a short-term strategy to build up their potential live audience through Spotify and other streaming services, rather than focusing on selling physical product via a label.

The first, as-yet-untitled single from the album will drop online in April, the same month the band will appear at HRH Prog, Prognosis and the O2 Academy Islington.

"This one's a lot more psychedelic," says Stevens of the album. "Those gigs we did with Hawkwind [in 2018] must have rubbed off! I really do think it's the best stuff we've ever done." **GRM**

> **"The new material is taking us into uncharted territory."**

For the latest album updates and tickets see www.thefierceandthedead.com.

INTRO extras

NEW JAZZ-PROG RELEASES ON ECLIPSE

Finnish prog label Eclipse are ramping up their physical releases in 2022. Upcoming albums include *Distance*, which is the second album by Jacques Daniels Project, the experimental group led by singer-songwriter Jari Karjalainen. Also available is *Arc*, from prog/fusion artist Ossi Maristo, and the self-titled debut LP by Helsinki jazz supergroup Mortality, featuring Eclipse label head Tapio Ylinen. For more on these and the label's other releases go to www.eclipsemusic.fi.

PRESS/NICK FANCHER

Moody Blues: Muse, clearly delighted to be back.

MUSE *WON'T STAND DOWN* IN 2022.

The Devon trio break their silence with new music, and announce festival dates.

Proggy rockers Muse have returned with their first new material in more than three years, and have announced a series of European festival dates this summer.

The Grammy winners' current single, *Won't Stand Down*, came out through Warner Records in January, with singer/guitarist Matt Bellamy calling it "a song about standing your ground against bullies, whether that be on the playground, at work or anywhere. Protecting yourself from coercion and sociopathic manipulation and to face adversity with strength, confidence and aggression."

The Devon trio – completed by bassist Chris Wolstenholme and drummer Dominic Howard – are said to be currently working on new music, so more material should be on the way this year.

Muse have become one of the UK's most successful rock bands on the international scene since forming in 1994. Their last album – their eighth – was 2018's *Simulation Theory*, which hit No.1 in the UK (their sixth consecutive album to do so), also landing high in Top 10s across Europe and hitting No.12 in the US.

The 15 festival appearances they've announced so far for this year begin on June 3 at Rock AM Ring in Nürburgring, Germany and conclude on July 10 at Les Déferlantes Festival in Céret, France. The run will include a headline set at the Isle Of Wight Festival on June 19, their first UK show since their Birmingham Arena date in September 2019.

For the latest information on the band and for ticket details go to the band's website, www.muse.mu. **GRM**

PATTERSON & MELBOURNE'S NEW *DAWN* ON BAD ELEPHANT

The Regenesis duo release second album, *Dark Before Dawn*.

Prog duo Tony Patterson and Doug Melbourne have signed to Bad Elephant Music for the release of their second album.

The pair — who met as members of leading Genesis tribute act Regenesis — will unveil *Dark Before Dawn* on February 25. It's the follow-up to their acclaimed 2019 debut, *The Divide*. "We never really stopped writing after that," Melbourne tells *Prog*, "but Tony's wife became ill, and caring for her dominated his life for those two years." Sadly Patterson's wife, Angela, died in September; *Dark Before Dawn* is dedicated to her.

Melbourne describes the new music as "a little bit different and slightly more ambitious, because we were more confident about what we were doing. There's a little less programming, more live playing."

The guest performers include Melbourne's wife Carrie, who played bass for Mike Oldfield in the late 90s. For more details and for album pre-orders visit www.bit.ly/pattersonmelbourne. **GRM**

PRESS/NORMAN GLOVER

Dark duo: Tony Patterson and Doug Melbourne.

tangerine dream

WED 02 MARCH		BELFAST, LIMELIGHT 1
THU 03 MARCH		DUBLIN, LIBERTY HALL
SAT 05 MARCH	FINAL TICKETS	MANCHESTER, RNCM THEATRE
SUN 06 MARCH		EDINBURGH, ASSEMBLY ROOMS
MON 07 MARCH		GLASGOW, ST. LUKES
WED 09 MARCH		NEWCASTLE, RIVERSIDE
THU 10 MARCH		LIVERPOOL, GRAND CENTRAL
FRI 11 MARCH		COVENTRY CATHEDRAL
SAT 12 MARCH		CAMBRIDGE, CORN EXCHANGE
SUN 13 MARCH		BIRMINGHAM, TOWN HALL
TUE 15 MARCH	FINAL TICKETS	LEEDS, BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
WED 16 MARCH		BRISTOL, TRINITY CENTRE
THU 17 MARCH		EXETER, PHOENIX
FRI 18 MARCH		LONDON, ROUNDHOUSE
MON 21 MARCH		SOUTHAMPTON, ENGINE ROOMS

From Virgin to Quantum Years 2022

TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM: TICKETEK.CO.UK
TANGERINEDREAM-MUSIC.COM

TEG | mjr

AIRBAG'S BJØRN RIIS BRINGS *EVERYTHING*

The guitarist channels teenage favourites on new solo album, *Everything To Everyone*.

Teenage kicks: Bjørn Riis.

PRESS/ ANNE-MARIE FORKER

Airbag guitarist Bjørn Riis is set to release his brand new solo album, *Everything To Everyone*, on April 8 via Karisma. The record sees him drawing on the unlikely influences of both Dante's *Inferno* and Whitesnake.

"I knew I wanted to do something slightly different to my other solo albums," says Riis, who sings as well as plays guitar here. "My last album, [2019's] *A Storm Is Coming*, was quite a dark record, but this time I wanted to give the music more of an optimistic feel. Most of the songs were written in early demo form prior to the pandemic, so that didn't have much of an effect on the actual music."

Riis says that, while writing, he dug deep into his own formative musical influences. "I wanted to explore different sides of my music and the inspirations I had when I was a teenager: Kiss, Whitesnake, Black Sabbath. The second track on the album, *Lay Me Down*, started out as me wanting to write an early Whitesnake ballad."

But Airbag fans need not worry that Riis has gone hair metal. With its six tracks clocking in at 50 minutes, and featuring appearances from Wobbler's Kristian Hultgren, Oak's Simen Valldal Johannessen and Airbag drummer Henrik Bergan Fossum, *Everything To Everyone* adheres to the Norwegian's expansive approach to music. The album also an overarching theme, if not an outright concept.

"It's about the search for something that's real, that's genuinely you," he says. "The title itself refers to the idea of trying to meet everyone's perceived expectation of yourself. When I was writing the song, I saw a documentary about Dante's *Inferno* and *The Divine Comedy*. The quest he's on relates to the life we live — you meet people that want to help you and people that let you down, and in the middle of that you try to meet everyone's expectations. And it applies to today's generation and their relationship with social media — clicking likes and all that."

Riis plans to play shows in support of the album later in the year, as well as with Airbag. But he's not kicking his heels while the world waits to get back to normal.

"We're slowly starting to work on a new Airbag album," he says. "We have some ideas and sketches lying around, but that will be further into the future. I'm also working on a new solo project. I'm not sure exactly what it's going to be, but it will be very different." **DEV**

"I wanted to explore the inspirations I had when I was a teenager..."

For more on Riis and Everything To Everyone see www.bjornriis.com.

INTRO extras

IO EARTH PART WAYS WITH SINGER LEFEVRE

British proggers IO Earth have split with singer Rosanna Lefevre, who appeared on their 2018 album *Solitude* and 2020's *Aura*. In a statement Lefevre thanked the band and fans, saying her five years in IO Earth had come to "a natural end", adding: "I have thoroughly and sincerely enjoyed being part of the IO Earth journey." The band say their plans, including those for upcoming album release *Sanctuary*, still stand.

Space cadets: Tangerine Dream, back on the road.

PRESS/KATJA RUGE

TANGERINE DREAM'S NEW LP AND TOUR

Tangs to play the UK to promote *Raum*, their second LP since Edgar Froese's death.

The new Tangerine Dream album, *Raum*, will land on February 25 via Kscope/Eastgate Music, and the current iteration of the band will support the release with a tour.

The follow-up to 2017's LP *Quantum Gate*, *Raum* is the band's second album release following the death of founder Edgar Froese in January 2015, and it's billed as featuring "late-night real-time compositions, [...] sequencer-driven haunting soundscapes [and] anthemic warm synthesisers".

While writing the music the current line-up – Thorsten Quaeschning, Hoshiko Yamane and Paul Frick – were given full access to Froese's digital music production system and his tape archive, which captured ideas he recorded between 1977 and 2013. The trio say that, "With deep respect for the sound of the previous five decades, this record continues in the ever-evolving pathway of Tangerine Dream."

Fans got a taste of the latest material on the *Probe 6-8* EP, released late last year. While the band did get to play two festival dates in August in Poland, their last proper outing was the Random & Revision Tour in 2019. They'll return to the live arena this March with their From Virgin To The Quantum Years Tour. Opening at Belfast's Limelight 1 on March 2, the run includes shows across the UK, including HRH Prog XII in Great Yarmouth on March 19.

For their full tour schedule and more on *Raum* go to the official site, www.tangerinedreammusic.com. **GRM**

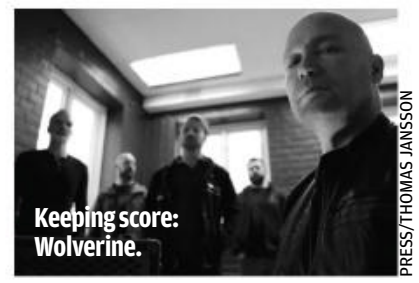
WOLVERINE'S *A DARKENED SUN* SEES THE LIGHT ON VINYL

Swedes' score for acclaimed film gets limited release on wax.

On February 25 Sensory Records will release a strictly limited vinyl edition of Wolverine's music for the acclaimed short film, *A Darkened Sun*.

Four pieces by the Swedish progressive metal band accompany the 2020 film, which was a collaboration with Swedish filmmaker Thomas Jansson. The highly metaphorical, 28-minute film, about a young woman's "existential journey [as] she is forced to confront her inner self", won numerous accolades on the independent film festival circuit.

Recorded by Wolverine members Marcus Losbjer and Per Henriksson, the score was previously released on digital platforms, and is now being offered on deluxe, high-definition 45rpm vinyl. Just 400 copies have been made, with 300 pressed on black vinyl, 100 on dark red vinyl. These can be ordered at bit.ly/wolverinepreorder, while the film *A Darkened Sun* is free to watch on the band's YouTube channel. Search on the site or visit www.bit.ly/wolverinedarkenedsun. **GRM**



Keeping score: Wolverine.

PRESS/THOMAS JANSSON

FAD GADGETS

Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

RHODES MK8

The first Rhodes pianos were devised as instruments that could be played by convalescing WW2 soldiers while sitting in a hospital bed. By the 1970s Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock had helped them become a mainstay of jazzy rock and pop. The piano's rich, chorused sound and shimmering tones can be found on all kinds of records, partly due to the countless computerised emulations available. The new model, the Mark 8, looks and sounds beautiful, and can be all yours for between £7,000 and £10,000, depending on how souped up you want it. I'll be sticking to the computerised version, but I can dream.
www.rhodesmusic.com

GREENAXE

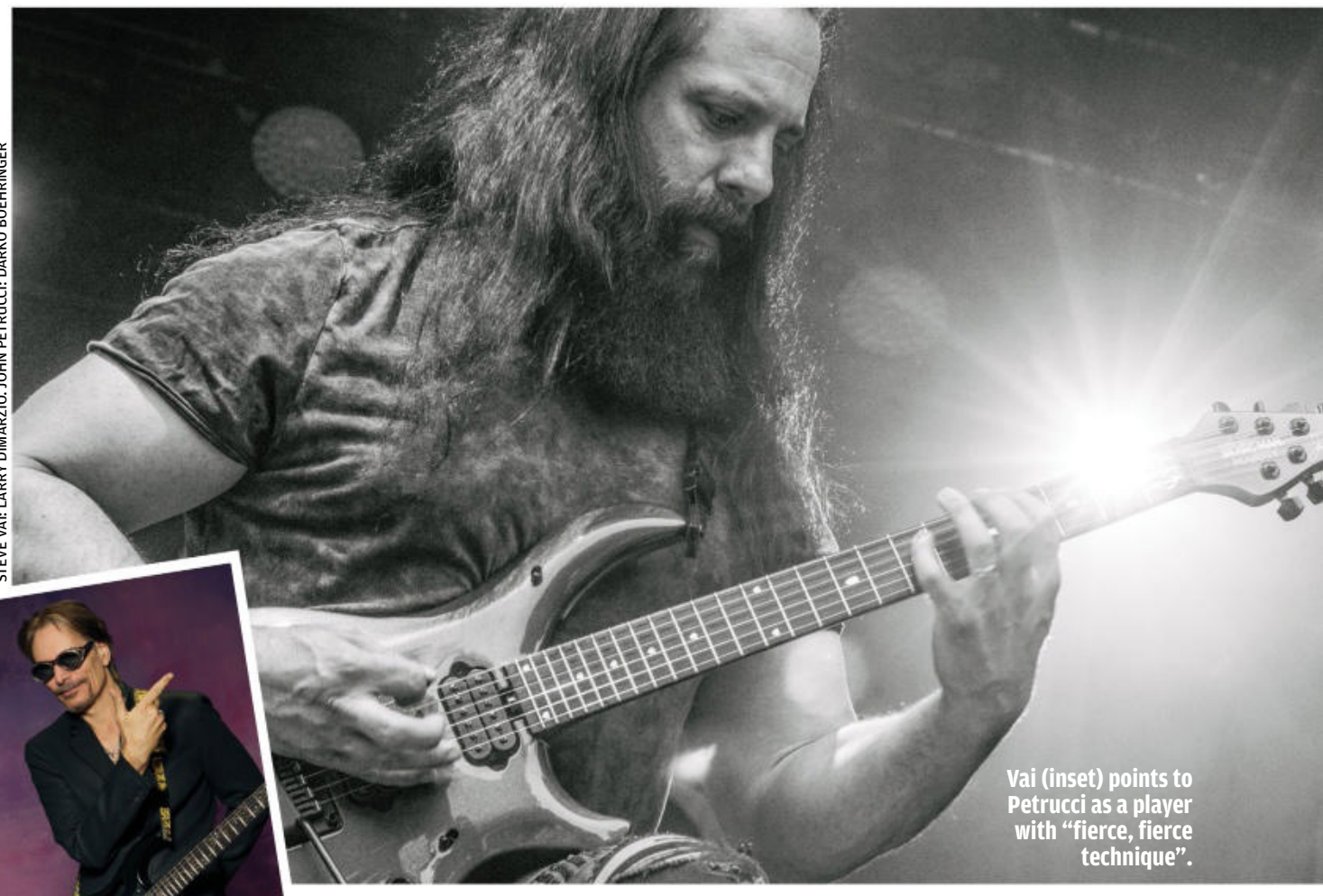
In recent years, 3D printing has reached a level of sophistication where buildings, food and even body parts can be printed out. But 3D printed wood – real wood that is – hasn't yet become a thing... yet. This guitar, devised by a New Zealand professor named Olaf Diegel, might begin to change all that. Not only is it an ingenious way of deploying modern technology, its main raw material – sawdust – is a waste product that costs virtually nothing and would normally be thrown away or burned. You won't find a guitar with more impeccable green credentials.
www.forust.com

303 CLONE

The Roland TB-303, also known as the 'acid dream machine' or 'silverbox', was the defining sound of acid house music in the late 1980s. It was hilariously unpopular at the time, but the likes of Fatboy Slim found its swoops and squelches irresistible, and the little box became almost fetishised. Behringer, who seem to specialise in producing cheap versions of classic audio technology and worrying about court cases later, now make this lovely little version – more powerful than the original – for under £100.
www.behringer.com

MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...



STEVE VAI: LARRY DIMARZIO. JOHN PETRUCCI: DARKO BOEHRINGER

Vai (inset) points to Petrucci as a player with "fierce, fierce technique".

STEVE VAI

Steve knows a good guitarist when he hears one, and sings the praises of his fellow axe god, Berklee alumnus and nice guy, **John Petrucci**.

"I had a friend who turned me on to the prog of the 70s. It was sometimes a little heady and meandering for me, and I liked rock more. When I was at Berklee [College Of Music, in the late 70s] I got much more into fusion-y prog, and not long after that I met John, back when Dream Theater were brand new. I started to follow him, and he's never ceased to amaze me.

"I've watched John progress through the years, and I've played with him [on the bill of Joe Satriani's G3 tour], and he's just a completely full, rounded, authentic prog demi-god.

"All the elements are in place. He has fierce, fierce technique, and I know what it takes to gain that kind of technique, and to withhold it. Discipline alone doesn't do it – you need passion, you need to really want it and have a deep interest.

"He's continued to evolve Dream Theater's prog roots into contemporary times. When the seven-string guitar came out and people started tuning down, this whole subculture that emerged – djent, whatever you want to call it – and John really makes the most of that. The band's prog has cerebral stimulation to it, and when he starts cutting loose on guitar, it's *fascinating*. His chops and his choice of notes continue to grow, and he has stunning intonation, which is a big thing for me.

"John's a very prolific guy too, very organised and professional. His last solo record [*Terminal Velocity*, 2020] has just got some crazy, stunning stuff on it, but one of my favourites of is actually *An Evening With John Petrucci And Jordan Rudess* [2000]. I think John had [an electric] guitar with a pickup on it so it sounded like an acoustic, and he could really rip on it, with Jordan playing the piano. It was a live recording – a great record.

"And, anybody that doesn't get along with John Petrucci must be a really big asshole. He's one of the nicest guys I've ever met in this business. He's great to tour with, funny, and very supportive of his fellow guitar brothers, including beginners. I've never heard him say a bad word about anybody. Don't get the wrong idea – he's a badass, but he's a kind soul, a gentleman. With a big hairy face..." **GRM**

"Anybody who doesn't get along with John must be a really big asshole..."

Inviolate is out now on Favored Nations/Mascot. See www.vai.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

Multi-instrumentalist and vocalist **Roger Eno** (right) releases *The Turning Year* on April 22 through Deutsche Grammophon. The solo album follows *Mixing Colours*, his acclaimed 2020 duo record with his brother, Brian. More info at www.rogereno.com.

PRESS/CECILY ENO

Mikael Åkerfeldt joined the many artists paying tribute to Burke Shelley, the singer and bassist for Budgie, who died on January 10. "Burke had a jazzy quality to his voice," the Opeth star wrote, "as well as the ability to scream with the best of them."

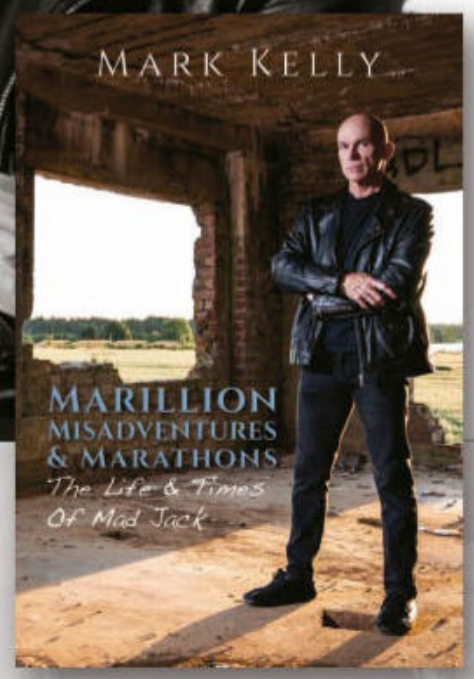
Frank Zappa's legendary four-show run at the Fillmore East in 1971, and his show at London's Rainbow Theatre, get the definitive treatment with *The Mothers 1971*. This bonus-packed, eight-disc box set is out on March 18 via Zappa Records/UMe.

MARK KELLY

MARILLION
MISADVENTURES & MARATHONS

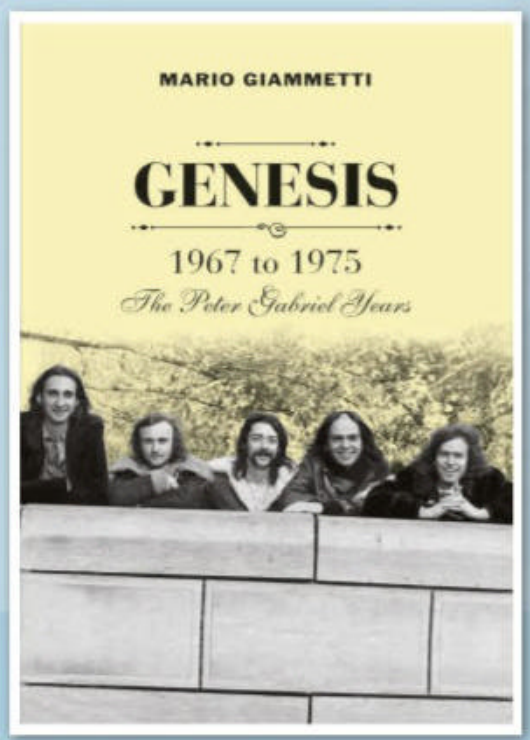
The Life & Times Of Mad Jack

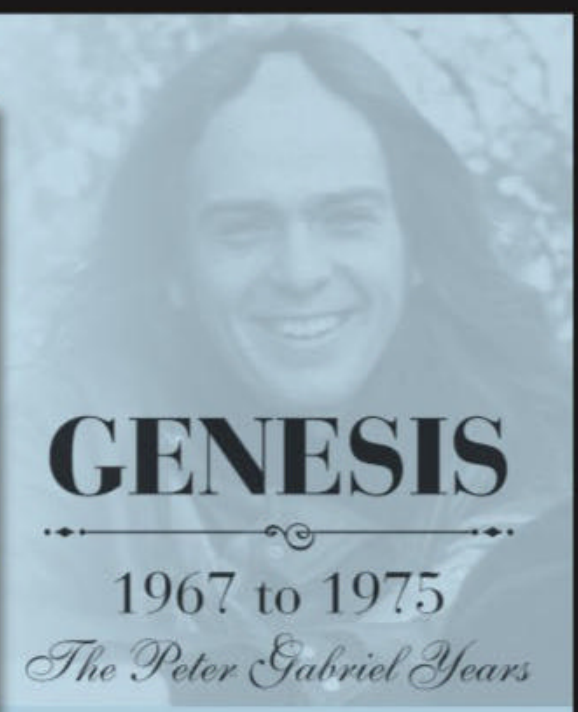
The compelling and hugely entertaining autobiography by Mark Kelly charting the remarkable rise and fall and rise again of one of rock music's most enduring bands and the keyboard player at the heart of that journey.

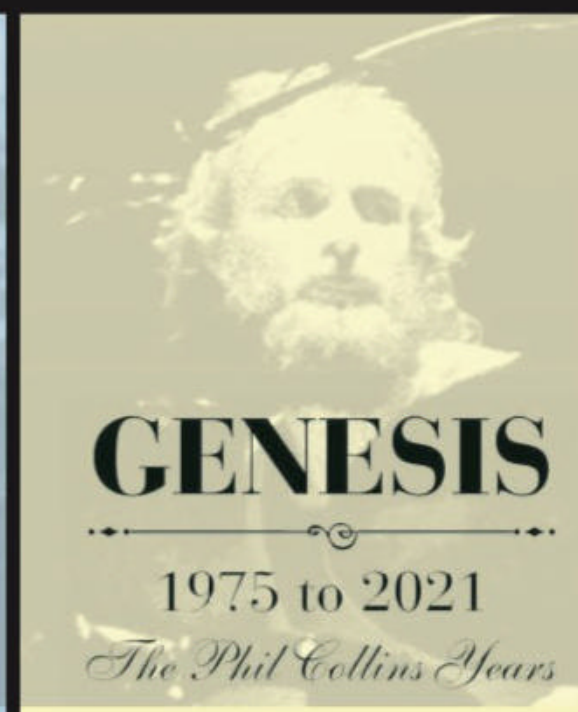


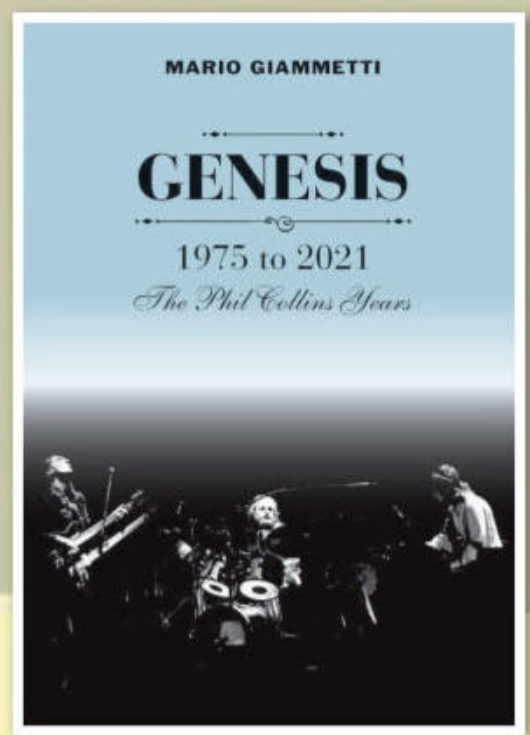
"Mark Kelly deserves so much credit. An incredibly gifted musician and composer, he has now written a book that is compelling reading. It's rare to find such honesty in a book like this and undoubtedly it was written from the heart." **RICK WAKEMAN**

KINGMAKER



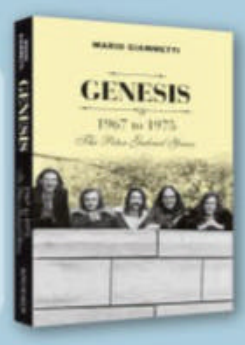


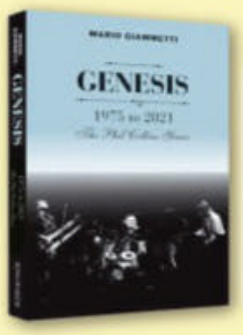




GENESIS: The Peter Gabriel Years

'A must for all fans who are interested in early Genesis. I thoroughly recommend it.' **STEVE HACKETT**
'Essential for anyone with more than a passing interest in the band.' **PROG**





GENESIS: The Phil Collins Years

'Much of the tale is told in quotes gleaned from extensive, frank interviews with the players… This is close to definitive.' **MOJO**
'Reverent, well researched. Bejewelled with photos and souvenirs, this encomium will be hard for any believer to resist.' **CLASSIC ROCK**

Written by Mario Giammetti, one of the leading experts on the history of the band, these are the definitive biographies of Genesis.

Available now from Burning Shed, Amazon and all good bookstores

PRESS/EMILIE MAUGER

Secret service: Olivier Pain, Léo Goizet and Léo Pinon-Chaby.

BARON CRÂNE

The explosive French trio broaching stoner rock, jazz-fusion, and much more.

"THE FEEDBACK I love the most is when people say, 'I don't usually listen to this type of music but I really loved watching you play,'" says Léo Goizet, drummer for Baron Crâne. Formed in 2014 and based in Paris, the French trio released their fourth album, *Les Beaux Jours*, last year, having steadily gained recognition through stoner rock YouTube channels and extensive European tours, notably with Ufomammut.

"The stoner rock scene welcomed our music," says Goizet, "but I don't think we're a stoner band. The kind of music we want to create is anchored in creative freedom because we're trying to make music we enjoy playing, which is both composition-heavy and limitless."

Infused with jazz-fusion, Baron Crâne's prog sound is brimming with songwriting proficiency and live-band energy. They seem to toy with the listener with their ability to deliver melodies with varying levels of intensity, skilfully building up the anticipation towards the next rhythmic turn that each song will, inevitably, take.

"I write music on an acoustic guitar to begin with," says guitarist Léo Pinon-Chaby, "which gives the songs a common thread and consistency. Being three musicians makes it easier to make instrumental tracks through jamming, but our vision is to write music and musical arrangements."

Bassist Olivier Pain completes the trio, who have even minted their own mantra of sorts, *'Danjouer,'* a tongue-in-cheek conflation of 'danger' and 'jouer' ('to play') that encapsulates their fun-loving, risk-taking character. They have a pre-gig ritual too, Om chanting together backstage before going out and dishing up their delightfully hellish melee of rapid riffs.

"We embrace each other and we do Om chanting while concentrating on our breathing," Goizet explains. "We do this to connect with each other before we go out on stage. I guess we're pretty Zen rockers until we get up there — then it's a whole other story!"

Guillaume Perret takes centre-stage in the song *Mercury*, his serenading sax set to the guitar's rhythmic pulse and the drums' jazzy pace, a seemingly casual jam session morphing into a dream-like sensation. "That song allowed us to show our fondness for jazz-fusion music," says Pinon-Chaby, "which is something we were not able to do on the previous albums."

The upbeat rock song *Quarantine* features guest singer Cyril Bodin, who also appears in the accompanying music video. His deep tones add an extra, sludgy layer to a stand-out progressive rock song. *Merinos* sees flautist Robby Marshall set a tranquil tone to a distinctly slow-paced reggae beat, with distorted guitars and big drums taking the tune to some pounding crescendos.

"*Les Beaux Jours* is an album we worked really hard on," says Pinon-Chaby. "In my opinion, it's our best and most accomplished so far. We had a better production and more time to work on the tracks. We've found our way and this has given us a great amount of freedom."

"We put a lot of commitment into making beautiful things that have meaning," adds Goizet, and he's not kidding. Factor in artist Nora Simon's intriguing, proggy album art and the inscrutable, nine-minute music video for *Larry's Journey* by director François-Xavier Dubois, and it's clear that Baron Crâne's universe is big, bold and overflowing with inspiration. **ILD**

"We put a lot of commitment into making beautiful things that have meaning."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Léo Pinon-Chaby *(guitar)*, **Léo Goizet** *drums)*, **Olivier Pain** *(bass)*

SOUNDS LIKE

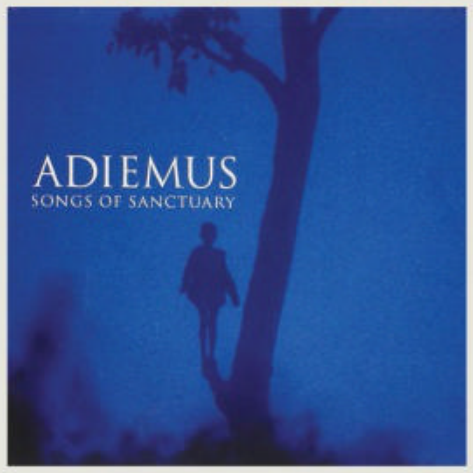
Instrumental prog infused with jazz-fusion and heavy riffs

CURRENT RELEASE

Les Beaux Jours is out now via Mrs Red Sound

WEBSITE

www.baroncrane.com



ADIEMUS
SONGS OF SANCTUARY

(Jenkins Ratledge, 1995)

It began with a TV commercial during which dolphins gracefully frolic in the sea while, above, a fleet of airliners cruises over snowy peaks. Ring any bells?

Retrospectively, this 1994 ad may have shifted a few more transatlantic plane tickets, but the real star was the minute's worth of immersive, haunting new age music accompanying it.

Commissioned by Delta Air Lines, the piece called *Adiemus* was expanded afterwards, giving its name to this unique classical/choral project, and appeared as the opening track on their 1995 debut album, *Songs Of Sanctuary*.

However, the identities of the duo behind this extraordinary new soundscape and its record label will certainly ring many prog bells. Sir Karl Jenkins and Mike Ratledge were Soft Machine bandmates in the early 70s, and Jenkins – a musical polymath – was also the sax player in jazz-rock band Nucleus. In '73 both he and Ratledge performed on the BBC's live-in-the-studio version of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*.

With Jenkins as composer, orchestrator and conductor, and Ratledge the producer and arranger of the programmed percussion, *Songs Of Sanctuary* and Adiemus' subsequent five albums presented a new genre of crossover classical/world music, often since imitated but never surpassed.

Its fusion of traditional European classical styles, lilting tribal rhythms and ethnic-sounding vocals were a revelation. The players came from the string and percussion sections of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. The voices belonged to lead soprano Miriam Stockley with second singer Mary Carewe harmonising, and the project's unique selling point is the otherworldly beauty of these blended female voices, multitracked to evoke a chorus creating new age, celtic, spiritual, ambient and gospel moods. There are no lyrics. Instead, the vocal parts were written in an invented phonetic language to make them resemble musical instruments. In parts the language sounds almost Latin; in others, African.

There's no better illustration than *Tintinnabulum*. Coming in at a prog-worthy 11 minutes, it starts with a doom-laden chiming bell and strings, but transcends with gentle tribal drumming, cascading voices chanting '*Adiemus*', and a plaintive recorder too. It's spine-tingling, especially when Stockley's voice soulfully soars higher, towards the heavens.

Not surprisingly, comparisons have been drawn with Clannad and Enya, and echoes of some of Jon Anderson's more esoteric solo work are also in here. Adiemus fans include Magenta's Rob Reed, and those flowing vocal phrases are present on his own Kompendium and Sanctuary projects.

The music of Adiemus is a galaxy away from the earlier musical careers of Jenkins and Ratledge. It might be too choir-like for some, but these exquisite, ethereal sonic vibes cruise at the same lofty altitude as many a prog album.

ALISON REIJMAN

ALL AROUND THE WORLD
Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Natraxas: These Greeks bear proggy gifts...

KONSTANTINOS STATHIS

NAXATRAS

The rising Greek psych group on getting heard, and setting their sights on immersive shows, Pink Floyd style.

The roots of Greek heavy psychedelic quartet Naxatras were laid down in 2012, when guitarist-vocalist John Delias and bassist-vocalist John Vagenas met at film school in Thessaloniki. Three years later they defined their jam-based sound with debut album *I*, and have since made a name for themselves with two more releases and extensive touring in Europe and beyond. The new album, *IV,* sees them bringing a more structured approach to their music.

"There's a legacy for rock music in Thessaloniki," Delias says. "Most of the most well-known Greek bands started here and the vibe is generally more carefree and chilled than you would expect from a big city. There are quite a lot of bands playing many different genres."

"We had to argue a lot with local promoters," Vagenas adds. "Prog rock was hardly represented. It's a kind of lost art, although the most successful Greek bands were prog, like Aphrodite's Child and Socrates Drank The Conium."

Both men lament the lack of festivals and small venues where upcoming bands can learn their trade, but they think things are improving in Greece.

Drummer Kostas Charizanis and keyboardist Pantelis Kargas complete the line-up. "We all share the same vision," says Delias, "even if each of us brings different influences to the table through diverse jams. Every step we make represents our artistic intention and identity at the moment."

Pink Floyd have been a particular influence on the band, says Vagenas. "The depth of the compositions, the variety in their music and the open mindset of exploring and defying boundaries in art."

"They paved the path for all of us to go and experiment," Delias adds. With their film school past, do the pair share the ambition of staging Floyd-scale performances? Delias' eyes light up: "Putting on a show that's completely immersive? Now *that* sounds exciting!" **MK**

"Pink Floyd paved the path for all of us to experiment."

Natraxas' album IV is out on February 25. For more info go to www.natraxas.gr.

PROG IN BRIEF

British space rockers **Spiritualized** return with new album *Everything Was Beautiful* on February 25, via Bella Union. Their spring tour starts on March 2, with 27 dates planned across the UK, Europe and the US. Details at www.spiritualized.com.

Robert Reed's Cyan (left) and Matthew Cohen's The Omega Point will perform at A Brave New Day, an all-day prog event at The Robin, Bilston, on April 24. They will be joined by two other bands, to be announced soon. Latest info at www.bit.ly/cyanomega.

PRESS/ JOAO FITAS

Not just a phase: Zé Pereira, Fernando Maia, Sofia Beco, Luís Dias.

PHASE TRANSITION

Portuguese prog-metallers tackle the state of the world on their debut record.

"I WAS INTRODUCED to Dream Theater by my guitar teacher," admits Phase Transition guitarist Luís Dias when asked about his introduction to prog. Drummer Fernando Maia took a similar route. "My father introduced me to Pink Floyd and other progressive music, but when Luís played me Dream Theater, I was in love. I picked up *Metropolis Pt 2: Scenes From A Memory* and I instantly stopped listening to anything else and instead just listened to Dream Theater," he adds.

"I heard *Scenes*... and I was hooked, too," adds vocalist-violinist Sofia Beco. "We used to cover a lot of songs off that record!"

It's through playing covers — "a lot of Metallica and Megadeth, to get better technically," says Maia — under the name Pernas De Pau ('Wooden Legs') that the Portuguese quartet formed. "We were in that stage of just playing covers and had a great gig at Hard Club, which is a pretty big venue here in Porto," says Dias. "After that gig we decided that it would be more satisfying playing our own music to people, so we did a 'phased transition' to composing our own music."

Although evidently heavily influenced by Dream Theater, a lot of other bands have inspired them. "Haken are definitely a big influence," says Dias. "They include lots of different elements, from electronic music to jazz, and their complexity — technical passages, alternating time signatures and groove — they do it all and with extreme expertise. [We like] Opeth as well, but for me Symphony X is the obvious influence, I learnt a lot from Michael Romeo!"

Adds Beco: "We like music that brings new ideas and playing prog enables us to do that, we can explore different ways of thinking." And Beco's bluesy voice and violin work also brings something different, too. As we discuss musical tastes and backgrounds, she talks through the concept behind the video for *In The Dark*, from their latest EP, *Relatively Speaking*, which was released in 2020 and recorded, mixed and mastered by producer Afonso Aguiar (aka TitanForged), who's a friend of the band.

"A song can have a lot of different interpretations but this video showcases two phases: one that's darker and another that's happier," Beco says. "It's kind of a reflection of our duty in the world; ideas that one might have when not in the best place, that we're in this sort of machine. Our EP was several ideas that we merged, but it definitely focuses on our society and the world around us."

Relatively Speaking was an energetic recording experience. "We learnt a lot with Afonso, he's a perfectionist, he really made us work intensely hard on the EP," says Dias. "After the first day of recording, I went home with such bad wrist pain that I didn't know if I was ready to record the second day..."

Phase Transition are currently working on some new material and although they have no confirmed live shows yet for 2022, they do have their sights set on some European festivals in the future. Take note, festival bookers. "We've been checking out [the line-ups for] ArcTanGent in Bristol, and also Prognosis in the Netherlands — that would be fun to play." **EM**

"We like music that brings new ideas, and playing prog enables us to do that."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Sofia Beco (violin, vocals), **Luís Dias** (guitar), **Zé Pereira** (bass), **Fernando Maia** (drums)

SOUNDS LIKE

An orchestral mash-up of Dream Theater, TesseracT and Symphony X

CURRENT RELEASE

Relatively Speaking is out now

WEBSITE

phasetransition.bigcartel.com

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

December 2021

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1 **RADIOHEAD** Kid A Mnesia *(XL RECORDINGS)*
2 **MASTODON** Hushed And Grim *(REPRISE)*
3 **GENESIS** The Last Domino *(UMC/VIRGIN)*
4 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** Bright Magic *(PIAS)*
5 **PINK FLOYD** A Momentary Lapse Of Reason *(PARLOPHONE)*
6 **MOGWAI** As The Love Continues *(ROCK ACTION)*
7 **FRANK ZAPPA** 200 Motels *(UMC)*
8 **DREAM THEATER** A View From The Top Of The World *(INSIDEOUT)*
9 **JANE WEAVER** Flock *(FIRE)*
10 **JETHRO TULL** A *(RHINO)*
11 **STEVEN WILSON** The Future Bites *(CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL)*
12 **YES** The Quest *(INSIDEOUT)*
13 **BLACK MIDI** Cavalcade *(ROUGH TRADE)*
14 **KING CRIMSON** Music Is Our Friend – Live In Washington *(DGM/PANEGYRIC)*
15 **JETHRO TULL** Benefit *(PARLOPHONE)*
16 **BILL NELSON** My Private Cosmos *(SONODELUXE)*
17 **MATT BERRY** Gather Up *(ACID JAZZ)*
18 **JEAN-MICHEL JARRE** Welcome To The Other Side *(SONY)*
19 **FIELD MUSIC** Flat White Moon *(MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES)*
20 **HAWKWIND** Somnia *(CHERRY RED)*
21 **STEVE HACKETT** Surrender Of Silence *(INSIDEOUT)*
22 **GOAT** Headsoup *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
23 **NIGHTWISH** Once *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
24 **GODSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR** G_d's Pee At State's End! *(CONSTELLATION)*
25 **WARDRUNA** Kvitravn *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
26 **MOSTLY AUTUMN** Graveyard Star *(MOSTLY AUTUMN)*
27 **CARAVAN** It's None Of Your Business *(MADFISH)*
28 **OPETH** Blackwater Park *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
29 **FRANK ZAPPA** Zappa OST *(UMC)*
30 **BIG BIG TRAIN** Common Ground *(ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS)*

FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.OFFICIALCHARTS.COM**

WIN! SIGNED TARJA BOOK

There's more to Finnish soprano Tarja Turunen than meets the eye and now you can read all about it in her very first book, *Singing In My Blood*, which is out now via Rocket 88. We've got hold of a copy of the signature edition, worth £130, which one lucky reader can get their hands on in this issue's competition.

Discover the untold story of the singer's life, view previously unseen images, and read the stories behind all her solo albums in this limited-edition version of the recently published hardback book. It's presented in a box with silver foil detail and you'll also receive two exclusive art prints taken by photographer Tim Tronckoe, who has shot the covers of many of Turunen's albums.

To be in with a chance of winning this brilliant prize, visit www.bitly.com/tarja_book and answer the following question:

Tarja Turunen has worked with a number of big prog names over the years, but which of these hasn't she collaborated with... yet?

a) Steve Hackett
b) Mike Oldfield
c) Steve Rothery

For more information see www.tarjabook.com and tarjaturunen.com.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from February 4–March 11, 2022. By entering the competition you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition.

Now our turn...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing

MARILLION
An Hour Before It's Dark
EARMUSIC

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother

CHOREOMANIC
Choreomanic
CHOREOMANIC.BANDCAMP.COM

The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf

AMORPHIS
Halo
ATOMIC FIRE

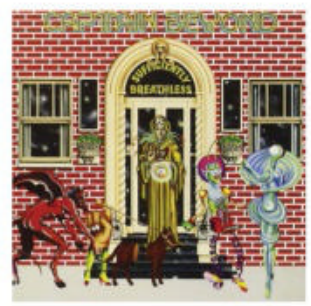
The Musician
Alice Freya

GOJIRA
Fortitude
ROADRUNNER

The Writer
Jordan Blum

STAR ONE
Revel In Time
INSIDEOUT

The Reader
Paul Watson



CAPTAIN BEYOND
Sufficiently Breathless
CAPRICORN

SAMIA ZAIDI

Make SOM noise! L-R: Justin Forrest, Will Benoit, Duncan Rich, Joel M Reynolds, Mike Repasch-Nieves.

SOM

Constants side-project mix shoegaze, post-rock and doom-pop to maximum effect.

SOM STARTED LIFE as a three-piece on their 2018 debut album *The Fall*, with vocalist/guitarist Will Benoit and drummer Duncan Rich from Constants, and Caspian drummer Justin Forrest on bass. "I can see what we were trying to do," says Benoit. "When we first started this band I had Killing Joke stuck in my head as an idea… that was sort of the starting point. I wanted to make something that was a little more over-the-top. Something that felt less exploratory, and more to-the-point."

For both him and the rest of the band, their new LP, *The Shape Of Everything*, represents a huge step forward. That's not just because they've added former Junius guitarist Mike Repasch-Nieves and his bandmate Joel Reynolds. The band have also doubled-down on dreampop, with the ability to also deliver crushing gut-punches, thanks to their current three guitar line-up.

"As far as being a clean break, it's almost a little of the opposite," says Repasch-Nieves, "Joel and I left Junius kind of at the same time, and had another band called Driftoff. We wanted to do something totally different to what we had been doing in Junius, and it was more stripped-down, melodic hardcore kind of music. We threw away all our delay pedals… with SOM now, I feel like I've returned to that, and it's been nice to revisit the aesthetic that I had stepped away from for several years. Looking at the more ethereal and shoegazey sound through a different lens."

Bringing in new members wasn't much of a challenge, though. As Repasch-Nieves tells it, the chemistry was there right away. "Part of what I think is the alchemy of this band, and why it works, is that we all come from different musical backgrounds, but we have some shared love for certain bands. Whether it's Hum, or Deftones, or Type O Negative, or Failure."

The real challenge was timing, and luck. *The Shape Of Everything* was written and recorded during the tumultuous first year of the pandemic, adding to the darkness and catharsis of the album. Luckily, most of the band had access to recording gear. Benoit has access to a full studio, while Repasch-Nieves studied sound recording, and took the opportunity to build a home setup.

Asked what they love about music, Benoit has no hesitation. "Everything right? There's nothing not to love. Music has gotten me through the hardest of times, and it's there in the best of times. It's the centre of my life, man."

His guitarist bandmate thinks for a while and then recalls an old tour story, "When Junius was touring, maybe 10 years ago, we played in Russia. I remember being in front of this audience, people came up to us before and after the show and nobody really spoke English, but people were in front, singing our lyrics. It blew my mind. I'll always remember how transcendent and strange that moment was." **AL**

"Music has gotten me through the hardest and the best of times. It's the centre of my life."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Will Benoit *(vocals, guitars)*, **Justin Forrest** (bass), **Mike Repasch-Nieves** *(guitars)*, **Joel Reynolds** *(guitars)*, **Duncan Rich** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Atmospheric metal with dreamy shoegaze and ethereal elements

CURRENT RELEASE

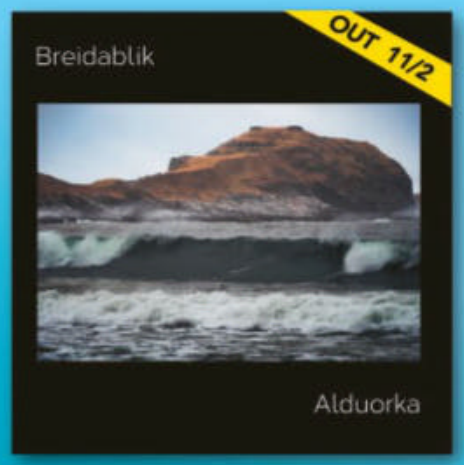
The Shape Of Everything is out now via Pelagic

WEBSITE

www.som.band

NEW RELEASES FROM APOLLON RECORDS

KRYPTOGRAF
The Eldorado Spell

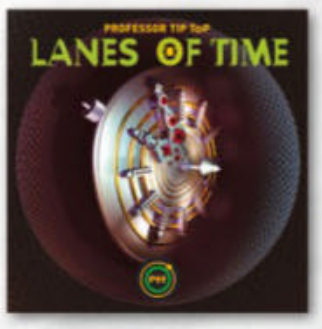


BREIDABLIK
Alduorka
feat. Håkon Oftung (Jordsjø)

SHAMBLEMATHS
Shamblemaths II

LAUGHING STOCK
Zero
feat. Nad Sylvan

WESERBERGLAND
Sacrae Symphoniae Nr. 1



PROFESSOR TIP TOP
Lanes of Time

DONNER
Hestitant Light
(a new project from Jacob Holm-Lupo from White Willow, The Opium Cartel)

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New Day
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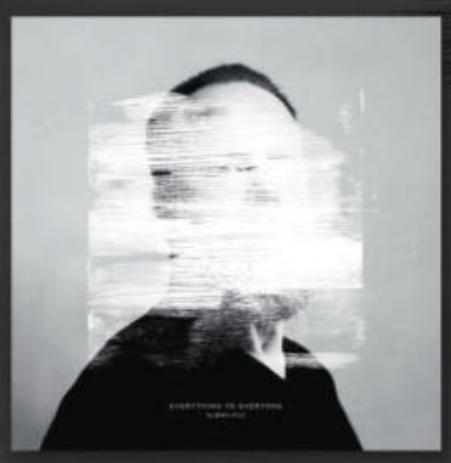
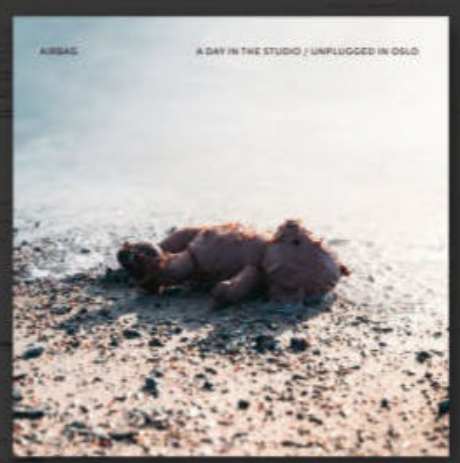


BJØRN RIIS

EVERYTHING TO EVERYONE

The 4th solo album from Airbag's guitarist is yet another masterpice with six epic new songs. In addition to the regular CD version, a limited Digisleeve CD version will be released, containing two bonus tracks. Two vinyl versions will be available.

OUT 08.04!



AIRBAG

A DAY IN THE STUDIO / UNPLUGGED IN OSLO

An acoustic live album/dvd recorded in Airbag's studio in 2020, celebrating their last album, "A Day at the Beach". The recording showcases one previously unreleased song.

AIRBAG

IDENTITY

Following in the series of remastered, top end re-issues of Norwegian prog act Airbag's catalogue, we are thrilled to present you Identity – their acclaimed 2009 debut album. "Identity" has been remastered by Jacob Holm-Lupo (White Willow, The Opium Cartel, + + +), and is finally made available on vinyl again – in a special limited deluxe version with a 12 page booklet and die-cut sleeve. Also out on cd/ltd digisleeve cd.

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Rhizone: they don't do things by thirds!

PRESS/LUKAS BRANDL

RHIZONE

With their three-album rock opera, these Austrian art rockers are thinking big.

THINKING BIG IS part the job for any self-respecting art rock band, but Rhizone are going above and beyond the call of duty, starting with their debut *Timelines*. "We realised really early on that we wanted to do a rock opera," says Thomas Hutter, the Austrian five-piece's vocalist, guitarist and occasional pianist. "This album is the first act, and the next two will be the second and third acts. Then we want to stage it in a theatre, with actors, film sequences and multimedia elements in the background."

It's a grand plan, verging on the insane, but Hutter is confident their grand vision will come to fruition. Centred around the story of a young man with schizophrenia, *Timelines'* kaleidoscopic approach takes in everything from modern prog to metal, free jazz and even hip hop. "Rhizone is about total freedom of creative expression," says guitarist/saxophonist Michael Auinger.

It's taken them six long years to even get to this point, such is their dedication to constructing their three-part masterpiece-in-waiting. Even before the band came together in Vienna in the middle of the last decade, Hutter — a German and history teacher by day — had already written the story that would eventually provide the overarching concept.

"I wrote it as a theatre piece," he says. "When we formed the band and started jamming, I realised that it would be perfect as a rock opera. That's when we started to include the story in the music."

Both *Timelines* and Rhizone themselves knit together psychology, psychoanalysis and philosophy — the band's name was partly inspired the concept of 'Rhizome' by 20th century philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which concerns non-hierarchical systems that produce different outputs with different parts. "In our case, we put together different genres and different styles to create something that didn't exist before," says Auinger. "Well, that's the simple explanation."

The plan is to release the next two albums, set to be titled *Borderlines* and *Lines Of Flight*, in 2022 and 2023. But while the 'script' for the full, overarching concept has been written, the actual music is a different matter. "Some of it is written but not recorded," says Auinger. "But there will be natural musical connections, motifs that reappear in acts two or three."

As for the grand stage show that will eventually bring Rhizone's ambitious vision to life, both men admit that it's a while off. "We're trying to get funding," says Hutter, "as theatre pieces are more expensive than just producing an album. We want to stage each piece separately, then in the end bring them together as one four-hour production."

Should it materialise, it sounds like it will be incredible. But even if it doesn't, it still presents another problem: how do they top three interlinked concept albums?

"I had a plan once that we would do an album in a different genre for every hour of the day," says Hutter. "Twenty four albums in 24 different styles." He laughs. "But that was a very drunken plan." **DEV**

"Rhizone is about total freedom of creative expression in any direction."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Thomas Hutter *(vocals, guitar, piano)*, **Michael Auinger** *(saxophone, guitar)*, **Lukas Brandl** *(bass)*, **Georg Hinterberger** *(drums)*, **Ulli Grill** *(synthesiser, vocals)*

SOUNDS LIKE

A hallucinatory art rock stage play about mental illness set against a sweeping, genre-spanning soundtrack

CURRENT RELEASE

Timelines is out now via Riot Heart Industries

WEBSITE

www.rhizeone.net

Q&A

GRAHAM GOULDMAN

He went from writing hits for The Hollies and Yardbirds to success with 'The Worst Band In The World' – 10cc, the experimental rock outfit he co-founded. Now the singer-songwriter bassist-guitarist looks back on his career and hints at what the band's upcoming Ultimate Greatest Hits Tour could hold…

Words: Jo Kendall **Portrait:** Reinout Bos

From the moment Graham Gouldman handled a guitar he was smitten, and it wasn't long before the Salford lad was composing for his own bands in the UK pop chart. But after a stint as a New York-based bubblegum pop writer, Gouldman knew his heart belonged at Strawberry Studios in Stockport, where he co-founded the influential art rockers 10cc with Eric Stewart, Kevin Godley and Lol Creme. Fifty years on, the line-up has altered as the band head off for their Ultimate tour.

You've written a lot of hit songs. When you get an idea, what instrument do you reach for?
My guitar, and if that's not to hand I'll put it down on my phone… but if it's any good I'll just remember it. It's a rule most songwriters have — if it's any good it'll stay in your head.

You met Kevin Godley and Lol Creme years before 10cc — how?
We are all in different bands and used to rehearse at the Jewish Lads' Brigade, a club in north Manchester, in the early 60s. I was with a band called The Whirlwinds and I wanted to make them more rocky; I'd heard Kevin play and I thought he was a fantastic drummer so I recruited him. We became The Mockingbirds and this solidified my relationship with Kevin and Lol — although Lol wasn't in the band he was Kevin's friend and a very good guitar player. We'd jam together anyway; Kevin's dad had a warehouse in Manchester and we used to go there and play Ravel's *Boléro* for an hour.

"My dad originated the phrases 'art for art's sake' and 'money for God's sake'."

As a kid you wanted to be a drummer, did you ever drum for 10cc?
Yeah, but I didn't stay [on the drum stool] for very long with Kevin around [laughs]. I'd had some lessons, but when I was 11 a cousin brought back a guitar from Spain and that changed everything for me. I fell in love with it.

Did your dad, Hymie, influence your writing with 10cc?
Yes, he came up with the phrases "art for art's sake" and "money for God's sake". *Good Morning Judge* came out of two things; one was the punchline to a joke — "Good morning, Judge!" — and the second was my dad and I talking about prison reforms and prisoners becoming more institutionalised — hence the last verse '*San Quentin is the place to be, I'm so happy I don't wanna be free*'. He also helped me come up with some lyrics I wrote in the 60s for The Yardbirds, Hollies and Herman's Hermits. He was very creative; he wrote plays and poetry. He was my first songwriting partner.

You were a bubblegum pop writer around 1969. How was that?
I worked for [producers] Kasenetz-Katz and they were great. The music I made I wasn't so happy about, nor the many session musicians we were using; I left New York because I became a partner in Strawberry Studios in Stockport and I wanted to do all the recording with my guys, who were Kevin, Lol and Eric Stewart.

When did Apple Records become interested in you?
In 1972 Eric and I had written and recorded a song called *Waterfall* and Apple were interested in putting it out. We thought it would be good if Kevin and Lol wrote the B-side, and that was *Donna*. When we recorded it we thought, "There's something special going on here." Anyway, Apple fell through so we got the song to Jonathan King, who ran a new label called UK, and he released it. That was the start of it all with 10cc.

What were the influences for 10cc?
The Beatles, Steely Dan and The Band. We also used humour — you could do that then, there's no humour in chart music now. Then we had individual influences, like mine would be Burt Bacharach, Hal David and Jimmy Webb, and Kevin and Lol's would be avant-garde. It was the chemistry between us that made it work.

The records sounded incredible, pushing boundaries…
We were experimental because we had the studio and there was just the four of us in there. Eric was an engineer, so we all got to learn how to record and produce. The Beatles had George Martin; we just had ourselves as influences.

You must have relished playing with new tech?
It took the music forward — and back. Kevin and Lol invented the Gizmo [an effects device for guitar and bass] and did an album that eventually split the band up. That was an awful time and I wish it hadn't happened… but what we're left with is the fantastic legacy of the songs, which is why I still tour as 10cc with two members of the Mark II band [Paul Burgess, drums, and Rick Fenn, lead guitar, bass, vocals].

What's your favourite song that you wrote with Eric?
Dreadlock Holiday, even though we wouldn't write that lyric now, and *I'm Not In Love*, which is just magical. When we play it live I like to see the kind of joy it brings people.

10cc worked with Hipgnosis for many album sleeves, what was that like?
I have very good memories. They were an integral part of what we put out because they had a similar attitude of employing humour and going beyond the norm. I own quite a lot of artwork by them.

What are the plans for The Ultimate Greatest Hits Tour?
It's going to be slightly different. There'll be all the hits you'd expect, plus various album tracks, and two new songs, but they're relevant to 10cc — when you see us you'll understand why.

Will Kevin make any appearances?
Kevin will appear on video, doing *Somewhere In Hollywood*. Is there a chance he might turn up in person at one important venue in particular? No comment! [laughs]

The Ultimate Greatest Hits Tour starts on March 25 at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. See www.10cc.world for more information.

The Clock Is Ticking

It's been six years since *FEAR* was released during a time of political turmoil, and yet nothing could have prepared **Marillion** for the challenges they'd face in making its follow-up. *Prog* catches up with the band as they prepare to release *An Hour Before It's Dark*, and finds out how they turned some of their darkest subject matter into one of their brightest and most optimistic-sounding records.

Clockwatching: Dave Everley
Images: Anne-Marie Forker

"I'm just saying to people, 'Go out and make things better.'"

Steve Hogarth

December 16, 2019. Marillion are playing the last concert of their With Friends From The Orchestra tour at The Colosseum Theater in Essen, Germany. Befitting the show's grand orchestrated conceit, the set leans towards the more epic end of their catalogue: *Gaza*, *Estonia*, plus the four-song *The New Kings Suite*, from 2016's acclaimed *FEAR* album.

After the final chords of closing song *This Strange Engine* drift away, the band take their bows. It's a triumphant end to one of the most successful periods of Marillion's career — one in which *FEAR* gave them their first UK Top 5 album since 1987's *Clutching At Straws*. But the band members' minds are on the impending Christmas break and the prospect of reconvening in the new year to begin work in earnest on their 19th studio album.

The latter will happen eventually, but it will be in circumstances that neither Marillion nor anyone else on the planet can envision. On the same day as the Essen show, 5,000 miles away in the Chinese city of Wuhan, a patient is admitted to hospital with severe acute respiratory symptoms. It is the first documented admission of someone suffering from what will soon be named Covid-19.

What happens next seems simultaneously surreal and all too real: the rising tide of uncertainty and fear, the escalating death toll, the closing of borders and government-mandated lockdowns, the disruption and despair, the chaos and grief. By the middle of 2020, there's not a person on the planet that the Covid-19 pandemic won't touch in some way.

For Marillion, as with so many musicians, the last two years have been the strangest of times. Bubbled up in their Racket Club studio-cum-HQ

Marillion: celebrating light at the end of a rather long tunnel.

recording the new album, they tried to block the events happening outside the window from bleeding into the songs they were writing. As singer Steve Hogarth puts it: "I was determined not to reference the pandemic 'cos I thought every writer under the sun was going to do it. But everything I was trying to write, it kept worming its way into the words."

New album *An Hour Before It's Dark* is out in March.

The album Marillion have emerged with, *An Hour Before It's Dark*, is undeniably a lockdown album, albeit one that has been informed by events rather than consciously confronts them head-on. Like *FEAR*, it is inextricably coloured by everything going on around it, but where that album was a dark, sometimes despairing examination of Britain and 'Britishness' in the run-up to the Brexit vote, *An Hour Before It's Dark* finds compassion and hope amid the chaos and confusion of the pandemic era. If *FEAR* was a state of the nation address, *An Hour Before It's Dark* is a state of humanity address.

"You can make two kinds of record in a pandemic," says guitarist Steve Rothery. "It can be doom and gloom, and the world's about to end, or it can be a celebration that we're still alive and we're still going and hopefully there's still light at the end of the tunnel. I like to think that's the one we've made."

Like the rest of his bandmates, Rothery is speaking to *Prog* via Zoom. The original plan was to convene in The Racket Club, but the rise of the new Omicron variant has forced a sensible change of plan.

Over the last two years, Racket became a kind of physical bubble for Marillion as they holed up there to make *An Hour Before It's Dark*.

"It was slightly weird being in there while all this stuff was going on outside," says keyboard player Mark Kelly. "Obviously, we were watching the news, but we were in the middle of doing our own thing too."

Kelly says the pandemic has been an unexpectedly productive time for him. As well as working on *An Hour Before It's Dark*, he moved house, released his debut solo album, *Mark Kelly's Marathon* and wrote his autobiography, the entertaining *Marillion, Misadventures And Marathons: The Life And Times Of Mad Jack* (see page 36). The only blip came at the end of 2021, when he tested positive for Covid. The symptoms weren't bad, but the timing was lousy. It was a week before the band were due to kick off their delayed UK tour. In a repeat of the crowdfunding model they pioneered in the late 90s, fans had clubbed together to provide a kind of DIY insurance to ensure Marillion wouldn't end up out of pocket should the tour be cancelled due to Covid. But Kelly's positive test could have torpedoed everything before it began.

"I was doing lateral flow tests every day and keeping the rest of the band updated," he says. "It completely scuppered rehearsals. Luckily, I tested negative a couple of days before we were supposed to start."

Even then, it took a few dates for Kelly's bandmates to let him travel with them on the bus. ("I'm, like, 'Come on guys, it's been three gigs, you've got to let me on the bus now'"). Yet even with Kelly allowed in from the cold, it was a strange tour. In order to minimise the risk of coming down with the virus, the musicians

> "It was slightly weird being in [The Racket Club] while all this stuff was going on outside. We were watching the news, but we were in the middle of doing our own thing too."
>
> **Mark Kelly**

L-R: Mark Kelly, Pete Trewavas, Steve Hogarth, Ian Mosley, Steve Rothery.

travelled and ate separately from the crew, a one-way system was put in place at every show, and even Marillion manager Lucy Jordache, and drummer Ian Mosley's wife couldn't join the band backstage.

"It was the weirdest tour we've ever done," says Pete Trewavas. "We hadn't played in almost two years, then there was all this anxiety whether anyone would come down with anything. But gradually we started burning off that anxiety and by the final shows there was a sense of relief and celebration."

Steve Hogarth talks about "an extraordinary vibration" among the crowds. "Everybody had waited so long, and they wondered if it was going to happen," says the singer. "If rock'n'roll was going to carry on happening, even. There was the same backs-to-the-wall spirit that we had on the Seasons End tour — we were out there against the odds, and that always makes something feel a bit more precious."

The tour was significant in another respect. It featured the live première of *Be Hard On Yourself*, the first single from *An Hour Before It's Dark*. A dramatic exploration of humanity's '*pursuit of luxury*' and its destructive impact on the world, the three-part song begins with Hogarth dreamily envisioning a '*big ball of rocks and water[...] blue and green and made of magic*', before plunging in the emotional knife: '*Why would you kill it?*'

"It's a song about the environment, and how we're going to have to change how we live if we're not going to kill ourselves," says Hogarth. "How less is going to have to be more."

The power of the song comes not from anger or sadness, but from its urgency. After nine and a half minutes of shifting dynamics and escalating drama, it ends with Hogarth offering a quiet call-to-action that also gives the album its title. '*Paint a picture, sing a song, plant some flowers in the park,*' he sings softly. '*Get out and make it better, you've got an hour before it's dark.*'

That line became the album title by accident — or, rather, by someone else's design. Hogarth sent a list of phrases and lyrics that could have worked to the band's art director Simon Ward. "Simon pulled it out: 'An Hour Before It's Dark' would be a really good title for this album,'" says Hogarth. "Then Mike Hunter, our producer, jumped on it and said, 'I think that's it.' It does encompass a lot of what's in there."

When he wrote the line, Hogarth originally saw "a picture of your mum

"I was saying from the beginning, 'We need something with a bit more pace to it, we need some guitar-based stuff.' We don't really do 'uptempo' – uptempo for Marillion is 90 beats per minute. But something with energy."

Mark Kelly

saying to you as a kid, 'You've got an hour, I want you back in before dark.' It was meant in quite a whimsical way." But the phrase contains a multitude of meanings beyond childhood nostalgia. It could be viewed as an exhortation to do something before our own personal clock runs down. It could be taken as an apocalyptic warning that humanity's time is running out in the face of impending climate catastrophe or, God forbid, a lethal virus. Or it could refer the final minutes before death, a subject tangentially addressed on the album's magnificent closing track, *Care*.

"I'm just saying to people, 'Go out and make things better,'" says Hogarth. "Paint a picture, plant some flowers in the park, give a fiver to the local *Big Issue* seller. Just do something useful instead of sitting watching the box. Do something positive for the world."

Like most of his bandmates, Hogarth himself has had a relatively trouble-free couple of years. He dodged the virus, though the first lockdown did get off to a painful start when he was bitten while putting up a set of lights outside. "I felt like I'd been Tasered: 'What the fuck is that?'" he says.

It turns out the culprit was a false widow spider — a less lethal relative of the black widow. He Googled images of similar wounds. "People had lost limbs with these things," he says. He didn't lose any limbs, though he did lose a tooth after opening a packet of cheese with his mouth. "It broke clean off at the gum," he says. "I got a big gap in my front teeth that I couldn't fix and a left hand that looked like Mickey Mouse."

Swollen extremities and missing teeth aside, a tangible sense of positivity underpins much of *An Hour Before It's Dark*, in a way that it didn't on *FEAR*. In contrast to its predecessor's occasionally claustrophobic approach, *AHBID* is more open and upbeat, lyrically and musically — ironic given the backdrop against which it was created.

"I was saying from the beginning, 'We need something with a bit more pace to it, we need some guitar-based stuff,'" says Kelly. "We don't really do 'uptempo' — uptempo for Marillion is 90 beats per minute. But something with energy."

Fortuitously, the band had earmarked 2020 to make a new album. "If we had planned a year of touring, it would have hit us really hard," says Trewavas. Still, planning to make a new Marillion album and actually making a new Marillion album are two very different things even without a global pandemic looming.

Steve Hogarth's hands are thankfully back to their normal size now.

The band long ago abandoned the idea of simply sitting down and writing songs. "We've done that in the past," says Trewavas with a laugh, "and it usually ends up being rubbish." Instead, they spend hours jamming in their studio, amassing hundreds of pieces of music which are all uploaded to Soundcloud. "Literally from the day we start jamming, Mike Hunter is running a multitrack [recorder]," says Kelly. "We must have nearly 2,000 ideas of various lengths, from 30 seconds to 10 minutes."

That was the easy bit. The harder bit was filleting those ideas down into ones that were actually usable. Mike Hunter, a man who more than one member of the band agrees is crucial to Marillion's latter-day success, suggested they each draw up another list of what they all liked next best. "And we did that, and of course none of us agreed on any of it," says Trewavas. "Not one idea was liked by us all. So then it's, 'Well, which idea do four of us like, which ideas do three of us like…'"

This process seems less like making an album and more like a series of fraught high-level United Nations negotiations to determine the disputed border of a mid-sized Central Asian country. And that's before they get

stuck into the arduous job of finding the way to fit all the pieces of music together. “It sounds insane,” says Trewavas. “But weirdly it works for us.”

There were complicating factors this time, too. The pandemic meant that the band were forced to Covid-proof their studio, installing Perspex barriers and hand sanitiser stations. “We all sit in opposite corners and work on headphones anyway,” says Hogarth. “So that didn’t make any difference. We just carried on jamming and faffing about like we always do.”

More serious was Rothery’s absence from the early sessions. As a diabetic, and carrying more weight than he’d like, the guitarist had more cause to be concerned about the virus than his bandmates. Deeming himself at high risk, he effectively put himself into lockdown in early 2020, even before the rest of the country did. “I was stuck at home for a few weeks while the band were working together on the album,” he says of the early stages of recording. “That was a strange feeling. But it gave me the opportunity to try and be healthier. And it wasn’t like they wrote the album without me — far from it.”

When the band did reconvene with Rothery in the summer of 2020, any hopes that the virus had run its course had faded. Like the rest of the country, the band watched infection numbers rise and with them the death toll. The situation would ultimately feed into the lyrics of *Murder Machine*s, the album’s shortest and punchiest track. *‘I put my arms around him, and I killed him with love,’* sings Hogarth, against a pulsing, guitar-heavy backdrop.

“It’s a fearful song,” he says. “The machines are the virus, and the fear is the physical contact — that by hugging somebody you might be giving them the thing that kills them. And it’s about the isolation that so many people had to endure because of the consequences of that. A great many people lost their parents without being able to be in the same room.”

Coincidentally, our interviews take place in the week that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is accused of breaching social distancing guidelines set out by his own government by attending a party held at 10 Downing Street in May 2020, while the first UK lockdown was at its most restrictive. The mere mention of Johnson’s name prompts the much the same reaction in Mark Kelly and Steve Hogarth.

“I can’t understand how we’ve ended up with such a fucking charlatan as our Prime Minister,” says the keyboard player. “The guy’s a clown.”

Hogarth is marginally less blunt. “Boris makes me angry before he opens his mouth,” he says. “In fairness, it’s easy to point the finger: ‘You fucked all this up, you should have done this or that.’ But at the beginning of it all, nobody had got it figured out. Nobody even knew how it was transmitted — did it live on the kitchen counter? What did piss me off was the feeling of Tories being Tories — they’ll never pass up a business opportunity to make a few million quid for themselves and whoever they sat next to at Eton. The cronyism pissed me off and continues to piss me off.”

No resting allowed. Marillion have already begun work on their next release!

Not all of *An Hour Before It’s Dark* references the events of the last two years. *The Crow And The Nightingale* is Hogarth’s “we are not worthy” tribute to Leonard Cohen, while the undulating 11-minute *Sierra Leone* is the vivid tale of poverty-stricken man who finds a diamond buried in a rubbish dump in the titular West African country, only to refuse to sell it. “It’s about dignity and respect,” says Hogarth of the song. Yet even here, images of *‘sleeping in the white sand of Sierra Leone’* evoke a sense of freedom that has been all too scarce over the last two years.

> “*Care* brings a tear to my eye sometimes when I listen to it.”
>
> **Steve Rothery**

But it’s *An Hour Before It’s Dark*’s closing track that stands as the album’s musical and emotional heart. *Care* isn’t just the best track on the album, it’s one of the greatest songs Marillion have written in their 40-plus-year career: a shifting, soaring journey that begins on the edge of darkness and ends, 15-minutes later, as a hymn to compassion and hope.

Two key real-life events inspired it. The song’s atmospheric opening section paints a vivid, first-person image of a hospital patient being fed *‘maintenance drugs to keep me alive.’* It’s based on a friend of Hogarth’s, who was diagnosed with a series of tumours down his spine. The friend would send Hogarth selfies as he underwent gruelling chemotherapy treatment.

“I was there with him, and we became much closer friends because of it,” says the singer. “But it just made me think that none of us know how much time we’ve got left, from the moment we’re born. The band were playing this really cool, dark groove, and these words about my friend just seemed to hang in it.”

The song’s central sections pulls the camera back, offering a contemplation of mortality and loss. “A final declaration of love, the kind of declaration you might make at the end, when you’re facing death,” as Hogarth puts it. “You go to the people who have loved you and you see it for what it is and you maybe want to thank them.”

However, the final section, titled *Angels On Earth*, is the real emotional kicker. Hogarth had seen a newspaper story about a mural in Manchester

painted by artist Paul Barber, itself based on a photograph taken in the early stages of the pandemic by a nurse named Johannah Churchill. The original photo featured one of Churchill's colleagues, Melanie Senior, dressed in sea-blue hospital scrubs and gazing sidelong at the camera over the top of a regulation-issue face mask, her hair pulled loosely back, the visible part of her face etched with a range of emotions: fear, uncertainty, anger and exhaustion.

For Hogarth, the photo summed up both the desperation of the times and the humanity it brought to the fore. As he sings, '*The angels in this world are not in the walls of churches… the heroes of this world are not in the hall of fame*', two years' worth of emotion comes rushing out in one exultant torrent.

"They're people who were working while we were sleeping during that crisis," says Hogarth of the 'angels' he's referring to the song. "The people who wore themselves out. The people who killed themselves to help us — those people who died as a consequence of the viral load that they picked up trying to save people. If they don't deserve a song, who does?"

The result is magnificent and moving, and not just to listen to. Hogarth admits that he "was crying singing it", while his bandmates admit they were similarly moved. "It brings a tear to my eye sometimes when I listen to it," says Steve Rothery.

And Hogarth's friend in Mexico, the one who went through his own medical struggle? He beat the tumours, miraculously. The singer sent him the finished version of *Care*. "He was knocked out by it, completely knocked out. He thinks it's amazing." He adds with a laugh, "So that's a relief."

Care encapsulates not only *An Hour Before It's Dark*'s greatness, but also its humanity and its optimism. These are dark times, and the album doesn't shy away from the fact. Still, the singer wonders if the subjects he's singing about will still resonate when the album comes out in early March. "They were most definitely of a time," he says of the themes he explores, "and the longer we leave it on a shelf, the less fresh it becomes."

He's worrying unduly, though the passage of time is hard to ignore with Marillion. Six years separate *An Hour Before It's Dark* and *FEAR*, but the gaps between albums were getting longer even before the pandemic. It's something the members of Marillion are acutely aware of.

"It does get harder," agrees Kelly. "With *FEAR*, we thought, 'What are we going to do after that?' And the only thing we could do before we even considered making another album was leave it alone for a few years. The idea of going straight back in the studio right away and starting on that long road…" He pauses and shakes his head. "H would just refuse. He'd have to come up with another album's worth of lyrics."

Except that Marillion theoretically do have at least part of another album already in the bag. They wrote several new songs in addition to the six that appear on *An Hour Before It's Dark*: depending who you speak to, it's either "three or four" (Hogarth) or "four or five" (Kelly) or "half an album's worth" (Rothery).

"They're different sorts of songs," says Kelly. "They're simpler, more straightforward, not your 10- or 15-minute epics. They're more 'songwritery' songs. Not that they're bad songs — we really liked them a lot, but we just felt that they didn't go with this album."

Typically, no one can agree when these songs might see the light of day, assuming they even do. Steve Rothery cautiously offers 2023 ("or 2024," he adds, covering his back). By contrast, Mark Kelly wants to release a new album sooner rather than later. He's thinking about ways of bypassing the usual agonies of making a Marillion album without sacrificing the quality of the music. "I've got a suggestion for the rest of the band as to how to make another album much quicker," he says, though he doesn't want to reveal how. "I need to email the rest of them. But it'll be a different sort of album if it does happen."

That's all in the future. *An Hour Before It's Dark* is a more immediate concern. Certainly, few bands this far into their careers make albums as vital as *An Hour Before It's Dark*. "If we stopped tomorrow, we'd certainly be ending on a high note," says Mark Kelly. "But I don't think we're winding down. Years ago, when things were a bit tough, I had a bit of a midlife crisis, thinking maybe I should get a proper job. I wasn't that bothered about touring so much, and I told myself I wouldn't miss it. Now I'm like, 'I want to keep going.'" He pauses for a second, then reconsiders. "Although I don't think we should carry on until it sounds shit."

An Hour Before It's Dark is out on March 4 via earMUSIC. See www.marillion.com for more information.

The Watchmaker

Mike Hunter's the man who really makes modern-day Marillion tick. We look at the man behind the mixing desk.

Marillion's commercial resurgence over the last decade has been as impressive as it is unexpected. A key part of their latterday success is undoubtedly Mike Hunter, the man who has co-produced every album since 2007's *Somewhere Else* and is the unofficial sixth member of the band.

"At this moment in time, we'd struggle to do what we'd do without Mike's input," says Steve Rothery. "He's not only got a great ear, he's a great mediator. We don't all agree with each other, and we end up pulling in different directions. He's the one that makes it all work together."

Hunter's role is more than just producer – he's the one person who knows his way around the vast archive of musical fragments Marillion have amassed over the years. "We'll be sitting there, going, 'What do we do with this bit?'" says Pete Trewavas. "And Mike will go, 'Hang on, there's this one thing you recorded five years ago', and he'll pull it out."

"We generally beaver away at things and follow Mike's plan, then all of a sudden we have an album: 'How did that happen?'" adds Rothery.

It was Hunter who encouraged the band to make the guitar more prominent on *An Hour Before Dark*. "He was keen to have more power chords this time around," says Rothery. "More than we have done in the past."

But it's not just studio expertise and a filing-cabinet memory that Hunter brings to the party. According to Rothery, he's also an Olympic-level diplomat – a useful skill when it comes to working with Marillion.

"When you're dealing with five people of a certain age and a certain stubbornness, you have to be thick-skinned," says Rothery. "Some of the things Mike has to put up with, I don't envy him." **DEV**

Standing Out From The Crowd

Crowdfunding, copyright claims and the birth of the Marillion Weekend. In an extract from his recent autobiography, *Marillion, Misadventures & Marathons: The Life & Times Of Mad Jack*, keyboard player **Mark Kelly** recounts the story behind the band's first fan-financed album, *Anoraknophobia*.

Words: Mark Kelly **Portrait:** Anne-Marie Forker

What was it Oscar Wilde said? "An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all."

We had a database of fans. The whole world was waking up to the potential of the internet and the dot-com bubble that would change the world was just drifting into view. We had no record contract and the US tour fund of 1997 had highlighted the fact that our fans would be willing to spend money up front when it came to the band. Saying that, it still took a few months from parting company with Castle and Sanctuary for the penny to drop. We might share the same barber (and by barber I mean that God cuts both our hair), but I was clearly no Jeff Bezos.

Not that we were sitting around idly. We were beefing up our website with lyrics, news, interviews and anything else we could think of to drive traffic there. As part of our push to become independent we even decided to take on a new employee to work alongside Erik Nielsen [the band's keyboard tech-cum-website designer]. We had no money but one more mouth to feed wasn't going to make much difference.

We had been very impressed with Lucy Jordache's work on the remastered albums series and over the years we had found out how much she cared about Marillion, even under the auspices of EMI. We invited her to come and work for us full time as our Marketing and Communications Manager. Her head turned by the offer of a pay cut and the wilds of Buckinghamshire, she quickly quit London and her corner office at EMI for a portable cabin in the carpark of the Racket Club. Not just one cabin, we had two! Affectionately referred to as the kebab vans. What a perfectly tuned beast the micro-sized Marillion machine truly was.

We had already started work on the next album and were still debating if we should sign one of the deals on offer. As Brian Wilson almost sang, *'God only knows we needed the money.'* And then, just like that, it occurred to me. We needed the money, but that was all we needed. We didn't need anything else from a record company that we couldn't do ourselves. No lightbulb flash of inspiration, just a problem and a solution.

Standing around the kitchen with mugs of tea in hand, I said to the

"It was us against the world again. We were making the album we wanted to make, confident and sure of ourselves, with our fans behind us both spiritually and financially."

Mark Kelly: proud anorak.

& Cards
BT

Pretty sure it only takes coins, guys.

JILL FURMANOVSKY

boys that we should ask the fans to buy the next album in advance through an online pre-order. The money it would bring in would fund us through the making of the album. I did a quick back-of-a-fag-packet calculation and figured that about 6,000 orders would be enough to make it work. History turns on such almost imperceptible moments, though I'm not sure they're always accompanied by a cup of Yorkshire Gold.

I got a few looks that suggested I had pulled a live raccoon from a sack and deposited it on the kitchen floor, but there was general agreement among the band. Lucy and Erik were especially receptive to the idea. Understandably, all the things that might go wrong were raised: What if we didn't make enough money? Would we look bad asking for a handout? Might the fans expect some control over the sort of album we were going to make? And so on. There were plenty of reasons why we shouldn't do it. But there are always plenty of reasons not to do anything. But as I argued (in the most genial way), sometimes you just have to dive off the top board and see how you land, so I pushed for everyone to at least try it.

Ideas go through several stages: from impossible to dangerous to the bleedin' obvious. Crowdfunding (a new word, it wasn't coined until 2006) wasn't impossible since the dawn of the internet, but it wasn't as omnipresent as it is now. It still felt a bit 'Wild West', but I was drawn to the unknown and the untested. Much like I was drawn to speeding red sports cars and the windswept high ledges of European hotels. I like a little bit of danger. How can you truly enjoy life when there isn't a small risk of death? Or at least an interesting scar you can tell your grandkids about. I have always believed that taking risks is good. If it goes awry, then try something else instead. I'm either right or may just be lucky enough to never have my belief truly tested.

Our first and most pressing need as a band was to find out if the fans loved the idea as much as we did. On June 16, 2000 (our drummer Ian Mosley's birthday) we sent out an email to the 6,000 email addresses we had collected asking fans if they would be willing to support a pre-order for the next album. So that we didn't have to read all 6,000 replies, we simply asked that they send their reply to yes@marillion.com or no@marillion.com (the mailboxes are now closed in case you had something pithy in mind to send) and we could simply count the replies. Almost everyone answered the call and there were only 200 emails in the 'no' mailbox.

Over the next few months, we fleshed out the idea of the pre-order (it sounds sexy, but I'm here to assure you it's not). We needed to make the album feel like an event, so the pre-order version came with a bonus disc, not available in the shops. We also offered to include the name of anybody who placed their order before the end of the year in the CD booklet. This served the dual purpose of personalising it for our backers and it gave them a reason to not wait too long before ordering. It sounds like small beer these days but was pretty revolutionary at the time, as was deluxe packaging and an array of formats. Not that I'm claiming the credit for every great idea in the campaign. These would often evolve out of the frequent chats and meetings we had, though my enduring memory of the campaign is that Erik and I were leading the charge.

> "Just like that, it occurred to me. We needed the money, but that was all we needed. We didn't need anything else from a record company that we couldn't do ourselves."

Although Marillion have been credited as the inventors of online crowdfunding (and not afraid to go on stage dressed in sackcloth with eyes emblazoned on their backs either), and I sometimes get the credit as the band member who came up with the idea, it doesn't take a genius to see how it evolved from [US fan] Jeff Pelletier's tour fund idea [which covered the costs of Marillion's USA tour in 1997]. We just ran with it. Besides, crowdfunding as a concept had been around in one form or another since at least the 19th century. Remember the debentures at the Royal Albert Hall?

Still, we were pioneers after a fashion. Imagine Hillary and Tenzing scaling the frozen white face of Everest, the perishing wind whipping through their beards. Substitute a warehouse full of boxes of CDs and some Excel spreadsheets for one of the most dangerous peaks in the world, and that was us, pretty much. At least that's what I tell myself before I bed down each night.

And, almost as a happy accident, it meant that as a band we had suddenly found our way again. Like stepping out of a dark forest and into the light of day. We had taken a journey and come back changed, but changed for the better. It was us against the world again. We were making the album we wanted to make, confident and sure of ourselves, with our fans behind us both spiritually and financially.

Around this time, I brought up the subject of money and how we distributed it. For many years we had continued to split the publishing income unequally, a hangover from the Fish years. Having not quite shed my communist tendencies, I suggested that we should revert to splitting the publishing equally again. We had been through a near-death experience and were closer than ever. It seemed like a good time to put our money where our mouths were. Once we started talking about it, then it seemed an obvious step to split all Marillion income, whatever the source, equally, which is what we agreed to do. This was a sacrifice for H [Steve Hogarth] and Rothers [Steve Rothery] and principally benefited Ian and Pete. But it felt good to all be equals again. All for one…

As the money started coming in from the pre-orders, we also realised that we could afford to hire [*Fugazi* and

> "It was how we felt about ourselves and our fans. Prog and proud of it. Anoraks all. No more trying to be 'relevant' or hip, whatever that even was."

Wired for sound.

JILL FURMANOVSKY

Brave producer] Dave Meegan again. Things were looking up.

Dave joined us at the Racket Club, and we worked together on the arrangements and recording throughout the second half of 2000 and into early 2001. There was some discussion about what sort of album we were going to make. We felt the pressure of knowing that the people were paying up-front and deserved our very best, but we were brimming with confidence that we could deliver.

From the uplifting opener *Between You And Me* to the roiling closer If *My Heart Were A Ball It Would Roll Uphill*, we knew we had something special. I know you're scratching your head at such an obtuse song title, so I'll tell you the story behind it.

It's the smallest of battles, but since the early days of the band there had been a struggle between the music and the vocals. Which takes precedence? Who should be louder? Naturally, the singer (every singer, it comes with the territory of leading a band) wants the listener to be able to hear every word they utter. What's wrong with that? Nothing, except that if you make the vocals louder, then the instruments go down in the mix. It's simply not possible to have "everything louder than everything else", as Ian Gillan famously requested during Deep Purple's performance of *The Mule* on their 1972 *Made In Japan* live album.

If the vocal is too loud then the band can sound minuscule in comparison, which might work in the pop world, but in prog rock? Never! This endless war for dominance often came to a head during the mixing. It could get unpleasant when two or more members of the band had a disagreement over how a mix should sound. Not in a Gallagher brothers' 'I'll break your guitar and glasses' way, but in a much more English way: the sort of smouldering resentment that can lead to an ulcer in later life.

It's stressful and unpleasant enough that when it was time to mix *This Strange Engine*, I decided to give it a miss altogether. Like a spoilt child I just refused to attend the mixes and let the rest of them and Dave slug it out. It wasn't because I didn't care. Instead, my reasoning was that no matter how upset or angst ridden I have felt about a mix at the time, a year or two down the road when I heard the song again, I wouldn't give it a second thought. Besides, I trusted Dave's mixing expertise.

Got a little off track then, didn't I? Embroiled as I was in memories of the mixing wars. So, why such an ungainly song title? It was H's backup plan in case the final mix meant his vocals were too quiet and that people might miss out on his carefully crafted lyrics. Calling the song *If My Heart Were A Ball It Would Roll Uphill* would leave no doubt as to the exact words he was singing. Thankfully, he held off including the song's entire lyric in the title, so a minor win for the rest of the musicians in the band, and for the audience when he introduced the song each night.

For the album, we tried to cover as many musical bases as possible, from the funk groove of *Quartz* to the heavy rock riff of *Separated Out* to the understated *When I Meet God*. The first song we wrote for *Anoraknophobia* was *This Is The 21st Century*. We were all very excited about how good it sounded but, not unlike many first dates, the initial spark of excitement sometimes sputters out. If Dave Meegan has a weakness as a producer, it's that he sometimes lets a song outstay its welcome. Often, he can't bring himself to take a razor blade to a few unnecessary bars. Which was the case with *This Is The 21st Century*. Lyrically, I would like to imagine H was thinking of me when he wrote that first verse. We are very different, he and I. He believes in magic and I believe in science. It works though, our shared world keeps spinning.

Not that I want you to think that *Anoraknophobia* was beset by problems; it wasn't. Gripes were minor, arguments few. We got on well together and it was a real pleasure to be working with Dave again. Even calling the album *Anoraknophobia* was a statement of intent we could all get behind; it was how we felt about ourselves and our fans. Prog and proud of it. Anoraks all. No more trying to be 'relevant' or hip, whatever that even was. We even had some T-shirts printed, emblazoned with the legend 'Marillion, Uncool as F**k', which the fans loved. Us and them against the world.

***Anoraknophobia*: Barry, Barry and more Barrys.**

Which isn't to say there weren't a few teething problems.

After practically pleading with the bank for a credit card machine, we had it installed in one of the kebab vans. For some reason the bank assumed we couldn't be trusted with such a tempting piece of kit. At first, it was exciting watching the little machine process the payments and experience the money flowing into our bank account. After a while, punching in credit card numbers reminded all of us why we hadn't pursued a career in accountancy. And to think, I once contemplated a bank job. It was mind-numbing stuff, even if we did know that it was helping fill our coffers with every order. We all took it in turns to spread the tedium.

Besides, Worldpay (the payment processing company), like many music critics before them, thought we were a bunch of wrong 'uns. Becoming suspicious of our sudden influx of cash, they started asking questions. They didn't like us taking payment for goods that didn't exist yet. They had a point. On the face of it, it sounded like a scam. Eventually they agreed to release enough money to us so we could pay for the manufacture of the CDs, holding on to the rest until they had been shipped.

We now had over £200,000 in our account and we hadn't signed our lives away. Having experienced the world of the indie record label of the late 1990s, we thought favourably of EMI once again. Lucy set up a meeting with her old boss, Nigel Reeve, and she, H and I went to see him with an offer to license the new Marillion album. No advance, we simply wanted the promise of a decent marketing

Mark stretches his legs with Pete and the fans at Port Zélande in 2011.

MARK KELLY/ MARILLION, MISADVENTURES & MARATHONS: THE LIFE & TIMES OF MAD JACK

budget and worldwide distribution, which he accepted. Win-win, or so we thought. We learned that not having an advance to recoup meant the record company didn't have as much incentive to sell the record. Their lacklustre approach to promoting the album meant that we resolved to utilise a much more hands-on approach when it came to our next record.

There was also the matter of the album cover. We really liked Carl Glover's work but felt it was time for a new approach. We pitched the title to a few different artists. One, Matt Curtis, came back with the cute guy in an anorak with a coat hanger in his hand. We thought it was perfect and told him so. He then, perplexingly, proceeded to change it. We spent the next few weeks trying to get him to give us the anorak guy (who we christened Barry) we first saw and liked so much. It was as if he was deliberately trying to change the design we had initially approved. Eventually, after much haranguing, we got him back to where he had started, and the cover was given the green light.

A few months after the album was released, we found out why Mr Curtis was so desperate to change it. Barry was a car thief! In a plot twist you would scoff at if you saw it in a movie, he had stolen the image from an anti-theft poster belonging to Toyota. The coat hanger was the thief's method of entry into the cars. Toyota threatened to sue for copyright infringement. EMI settled with them and went after Curtis for the money. We stayed out of it and got to keep Barry in the end.

While we waited for the album to reach the shops and our subsequent European tour, Lucy booked us a short set of university shows to see if we could reach a new and younger audience. The tour lost money as the ticket price was kept deliberately low in a bid to attract the student audience. We tried to discourage our usual fans from buying up all the tickets, but it was an impossible task. They went after these new, cheaper tickets the way dogs pursue squirrels in the park, but with considerably more success.

One good thing to emerge from all this was that Lucy discovered she had a talent for booking tours and, what's more, she enjoyed it. She asked to be excused from her marketing and PR duties to concentrate more on the management side of things. The sky hadn't fallen in after John Arnison's departure but there were some big holes in the day-to-day management that Lucy stepped in to fill. Things were on the up.

In September 2001 The Stranglers played a fan convention over two nights at Pontins holiday camp in Somerset. Lucy had been contemplating the idea of Marillion possibly trying something similar, so she asked Andy Rotherham, a longstanding friend of (and occasional guitar tech for) the band and keen Stranglers fan, to go along and check it out. Andy reported back that he believed the model could work for Marillion. The Stranglers' convention was organised by the band's manager, Sil Willcox, who Lucy knew from her EMI days, so she asked him to help to organise a Marillion weekend in return for a percentage of the takings.

The band were sceptical, and we told Lucy so. I was probably the most unsure, mainly because of the chosen venue. The British holiday camp was derided even in its 1960s heyday and its reputation had not improved with the passage of time. If you haven't experienced one, imagine a series of breeze block buildings leading to a function room staffed with grinning staff pushing forced hilarity and entertainment down your throat. And a swimming pool populated with bobbing plasters. And imagine it all in an endless grey rain. That's Butlin's in my mind's eye, in case Mr Butlin decides to send in the lawyers.

Pontins is a step down from that. I should add that I had never visited one as my parents couldn't even afford that when we were kids. I joked with Lucy that if we sold more than 1,000 tickets that I would eat a bowl of tripe. We sold all 1,650 tickets, but the tripe remains untouched.

Even Lucy, the most enthusiastic advocate of the weekend idea, couldn't have predicted how successful they would become. Like crowdfunding, which grew into a multi-billion worldwide industry and spawned numerous companies and copycat projects, the Marillion Weekend has changed our lives. Every two years we devote four months to preparing for the weekends in multiple countries (five in 2019 and possibly six in 2022).

In 2007 we moved the main weekend to the Netherlands. There is nothing quite like the atmosphere of Center Parcs at Port Zélande; fans come from all over the world to be part of it. It has grown into something much more than three Marillion gigs set over one weekend. It's a party of reunited friends, it's a music festival,

WILL IRELAND/FUTURE OWNS

The very difficult quiz: a solid staple of the Marillion conventions.

MARK KELLY/ MARILLION, MISADVENTURES & MARATHONS: THE LIFE & TIMES OF MAD JACK

On the case: Mark with H, Lucy and Karina (Mark's wife) backstage at Port Zélande on March 25, 2017.

Voice In The Crowd: Mob handed with Marillion fans at Port Zélande in 2017.

it's a family holiday, it's a weekend piss-up depending on your personal preferences. In truth, it's all of these things and more.

It's also a lot of hard work, worry and stress before it happens. But the pay-off is that it's equally rewarding and magical too. Plus, it brings in enough money to enable us to spend more time in the studio between albums and tours getting the next record ready. I'll always be grateful to our fans for making this possible and Lucy for pushing past my cynicism and dragging us through those holiday camp gates that first time at Pontins Brean Sands in Burnham-on-Sea in April 2002.

"Even Lucy Jordache, the most enthusiastic advocate of the Marillion Weekend idea, couldn't have predicted how successful they would become. Like crowdfunding, it has changed our lives."

The format of the weekends was set from the start with the decision to play *Brave* in its entirety. We really do test our fans. *Brave*, like lunch, is best consumed in one sitting. When we first performed it live, the audience hadn't even heard the album. I can still recall those quizzical faces looking upwards at us. Over the intervening years many people had grown to love that album but regretted never seeing it played in its entirety. We thought it would be a good draw to announce that we were playing it again as a special one-off for the weekend.

That set the mould for every subsequent weekend, where we would elect to play one album in its entirety on the Friday night. We also wanted to make the Saturday night something special and have tried several ideas over the years. People say there are no stupid questions. They don't say that about ideas though and there's a reason for that.

Over the years, it's been a pet project of mine to come up with a different theme for the Saturday night. For the debut Marillion Weekend, my great idea was Marillion bingo. This involved randomly choosing numbered balls from a bucket where we had to play the song that corresponded to the chosen ball. I'll be honest, I hadn't properly thought this through because we had to learn and rehearse about five hours of material to compile a credible list of songs. Knowing how much we hate rehearsing, you can imagine how that went down. As Pete once remarked: "I'd rather be worse than rehearse."

There were a few 'dummy' songs on the list too, not least *Grendel*. We had no intention of playing it and consequently there was no corresponding ball in the bucket. In any event, the songs that came up randomly were mostly songs we usually play live, which made the whole thing appear to be rigged. What's more, three balls with the number for *Grendel* had been secretly added to the bucket by the crew in the hope that it would surface. Thankfully, the prog gods were smiling on us that night and *Grendel* remained languishing in the bucket. We quietly filed Marillion bingo away and moved on to the next thing.

Something else we introduced that first weekend and have repeated ever since was Swap The Band, where we invite members of the audience up to replace one of us for a song. Five members, five songs. There was some scepticism from certain quarters that this was not our brightest idea, so we indulged in a bit of damage limitation by mostly inviting people we knew. Rick Armstrong played guitar on *80 Days*; Jan Henrik Ohme, the singer from Gazpacho, performed *Afraid Of Sunlight*; and Phil Harrison played drums on *Sugar Mice*. I first met Phil in 1997 in San Francisco where he was working for Sony PlayStation. He invited Rothers and me to his office with the promise of some free swag and we instantly struck up a friendship. We've been best friends ever since.

Marillion, Misadventures & Marathons: The Life & Times Of Mad Jack is out now via Kingmaker Publishing. See www.kingmakerpublishing.com for more information.

Time And Again

The last Ayreon album may have divided his loyal audience, but **Arjen Lucassen** is bouncing back with a reboot of his sci-fi supergroup project, **Star One**. Here the prolific progger offers his candid views on why *Transitus* split the fans, on writer's block and control freakery, and on the concept of new album, *Revel In Time*.

Time Traveller: Rich Wilson **Images:** Lori Linstruth

There are those musicians who create songs as a pleasant pastime, writing when the urge to be creative strikes as a fleeting distraction from their everyday lives. Then there are people like Arjen Anthony Lucassen, for whom music and writing consumes every single day of his life.

It's that drive that has seen him release music under a variety of guises, often laden with guest musicians to add even more sparkle to the recordings. The mainstay is Ayreon — a vehicle for all the genres ranging from metal to folk — which truly encompasses his approach to music. But there's been a plethora of other musical monikers, from The Gentle Storm, Guilt Machine, Stream Of Passion through to albums released under his own name. The uninitiated may be confused by this array of projects, but Lucassen retains a hugely loyal fanbase who, for the most part, adore the music he produces. That said, his last Ayreon album, *Transitus*, produced a definite divergence in his fanbase.

"I have to say that it did sell it very well," Lucassen tells *Prog, "*so that was not the problem. "It was just that opinions were varied and there was controversy. I usually don't really get that, but it was a love-it-or-hate-it album. I had the same thing with the Guilt Machine album [*On This Perfect Day*, 2009], which I'm very proud of, but people either loved it and thought it was the best thing that I've ever done, or they didn't like it and thought it was the worst thing that I've ever done. So that happened with *Transitus* as well and it wasn't received that well by the fans or by the press. I think the reason was that it

"Commercially speaking, I have no idea what's the best thing to do, so I decided that I just had to rock out for this album, just grab my guitar, come up with some riffs and not think too much about it."

Star One – Haters Nil! Lucassen grabbed his guitar and rocked out for his *Revel In Time*.

wasn't really a true Ayreon album. I'd wanted to make a movie, so it was basically film music, every song was written for the movie. We needed two million euros to produce the movie and it wasn't to be. So, the record company said 'Let's release it as Ayreon', which in hindsight was a mistake."

In a deliberate reaction to the somewhat protracted nature of *Transitus*, Lucassen has revived Star One — his project centred on the more progressive metal elements of his sound — after a decade-long hiatus. *Revel In Time* is the third Star One album, but the move isn't a cynical attempt at fanbase manipulation, and more to maintain Lucassen's enthusiasm in creating fresh music of differing styles.

"For me, that's the most important thing," he explains. "I couldn't be like AC/DC or a Motörhead. I couldn't just make the same album with slight variations. I have to do something very different. It's to keep it interesting for myself and of course to keep it interesting for the fans. Commercially speaking, I have no idea what's the best thing to do, so I decided that I just had to rock out for this album, just grab my guitar, come up with some riffs and not think too much about it. The writing for this album was really easy compared to *Transitus*, which I'd worked on for three years. The guitar is in my blood and I've been writing like that since the 70s. I can just grab the guitar, the riffs come out and they lead me into the melodies."

For Lucassen, such a speedy writing process is far from the norm. He has admitted to suffering bouts of nerve-shattering, stress-inducing writer's block. Indeed, he reveals he's currently battling his way through that creative hindrance while working (or not) on his next, unnamed project.

"Writer's block is awful and it's always the way it starts," he says, wincing at the thought. "It really is terrible. I wrote a song called *Pink Beatles In A Purple Zeppelin*, which says that every song has been sung before and every note has been played. Each time I start writing, that's really what I think. I will grab the guitar and then think I've already done this or someone else did that. I have to go through that and sometimes it takes six months until that one idea comes. I think it was the track *Prescient* this time. I remember thinking that it was different and worth working on. Then I get more secure and suddenly all the other ideas just flow. I'm going through that now because the Star One album was finished months ago, so I want to get into something new. But nothing is coming and I have no ideas and no direction. Nothing. Every time, I tell my girlfriend that it's awful and that the well is dry now, that I've done everything, there's nothing left and that I can only repeat myself. But so far, I've always managed to climb out of the black hole."

Lucassen's solitary lifestyle has meant that he refuses to allow any other musicians to write with him. For a perfectionist, that's an admirable facet, but wouldn't working in a band scenario provide unexpected creative sparks that might otherwise elude him?

"No, because I'm terrible at working with other people," he says, with a hearty laugh.

"Pick one, mister! Guaranteed to be accurate twice a day..."

The third Star One album, *Revel In Time*.

"You have to compromise and I don't want to do that because I'm a total control freak. Often people tell me that I'm such a nice guy and yes, I am, but only because I can do what I want. If I can't then I can be a terrible asshole. If you asked my old bandmates from the 70s, there will be people who totally hate me. One of the guys was interviewed in a Dutch metal magazine and had a whole page just complaining about me. I think the headline was 'Arjen is Hitler' or something like that. Of course, I'm not a bad guy but I am a control freak, and I guess that is one of the reasons that I do everything on my own – not just the writing but the production, picking the musicians and even the artwork or the promotion. When I start working with people, I say to them, 'I'm a terrible control freak but the good thing is that I know what I want and then I am happy.'"

For *Revel In Time*, Lucassen has again utilised the talents of a vast number of guest musicians. The original quartet of vocalists – Damian Wilson, Russell Allen, Dan Swanö and Floor Jansen – return, joined by Jeff Scott Soto (Sons Of Apollo) and Joe Lynn Turner.

"We needed two million euros to produce a Transitus movie and it wasn't to be. So the record company said, 'Let's release it as Ayreon', which in hindsight was a mistake."

Additionally, contributing musicians include guitarists Steve Vai, Michael Romeo (Symphony X) and Adrian Vandenberg (Whitesnake). Which all begs the question: given Lucassen's perfectionist streak, how does he guides someone with the virtuosity of Steve Vai?

"Well, it really isn't a matter of guiding him, as he is Steve Vai," says Lucassen. "I think my biggest talent is to recognise talented people, and to have insight into what the person will like. I had a part I thought Steve Vai would like, as he could do whatever he wanted with it. He could show off his virtuosity but also make beautiful melodies with the chords. I just knew that he would be interested, as this wasn't a part that he would usually get asked to play."

Naturally, there's a lyrical concept running through the album. The two previous Star One records contained movie references. The debut, 2002's *Space Metal*, hinted at sci-fi films like *Alien*, and 2010 follow-up *Victims Of The Common Age* came had a *Blade Runner*-style dystopian feel. This time Lucassen alludes to movies involving time travel, but he doesn't merely recount their plots – the references are far more subtle. There aren't, for example, any songs called *Flux Capacitor*.

"Or *Great Scott*," adds Lucassen, with a game chuckle. "But yes, it's basically time travel stuff like *Back To The Future* and *Donnie Darko*. I don't want to just retell the movie, use names from the movie or call the song *Donnie Darko* or something. I wouldn't do that. I have to watch the movie and think, 'What do they want to say with this movie? What's the message and what does it mean to me?' So that's pretty hard as I have to find a way to make it a bit cryptic, not just too obvious. I just watched my favourite movies again, which is a great way to work."

Revel In Time is released on February 18 on InsideOut. For more details, visit Lucassen's website: www.arjenlucassen.com.

Front To The Future - What's Next For Arjen?

"I don't want to do so many side-projects anymore," says Mr Side-Project himself...

So what's next for Arjen Lucassen? With the raft of side-projects at his disposal, he could conceivably record an album in any style he wished. But he reveals that he's considering taking a backward step from these projects to concentrate on Ayreon and his solo albums.

"I don't want to do so many side-projects anymore," he says. "It's becoming very confusing. It may be my insecurity again but if I look at the Guilt Machine album, I know that I can never make an album that strong anymore in that style. I've done that and if I don't feel that I can do something better, I won't make another one – I won't even try.

"That is why most of my side-projects just have one album. Star One is a side-project, but as I have only recorded a Star One album every 10 years, I will be 72 for the next one and I've no idea if I will still be a metal head at that age!

"I've got so many different projects. I can do folk, prog, metal or singer-songwriter music. I could do anything I want and I have to take advantage of that. My fans are so loyal and sometimes when I do a solo album, I think, 'Oh my God, who is going to listen to this?' To my surprise I have fans who always will. Ayreon will always remain the biggest thing for me as it has all those styles in it. When I do a side-project, focusing on just one of those styles, you reach fewer people but nevertheless you will please people who maybe like metal but don't like folk.

"I'd love to do another solo album as I'm really proud of my previous solo record [2012's *Lost In The New Real* followed 1993's *Pools Of Sorrow, Waves Of Joy*]. It was a really fun thing to do and it would be the perfect reaction to Star One, as my solo albums have nothing to do with metal. And there would also be no guest musicians or singers, as I would be the singer. But as much as I want to do that, there's the insecurity as I wonder if I can do something better? So that's the phase that I'm in right now. It's difficult to make something better each time..." **RW**

Rise And Shine

After a tumultuous period in their career, US trio **Cynic** were dealt a double blow in 2020, when two core members tragically died. The remaining co-founder Paul Masvidal re-grouped, and re-emerged with the fourth Cynic album. In his only interview for the UK and European press, Masvidal tells *Prog* the full, troubled story of *Ascension Codes*.

Codebreaker: Dom Lawson **Portraits:** Ekaterina Gorbacheva

The anticipation can be excruciating, but Cynic albums have *always* proved to be eminently worth the wait. Forged amid the saddest of circumstances, and yet one of the most uplifting records of 2021, latest album *Ascension Codes* is only the Americans' fourth full-length in three decades. It arrives after the tragic loss of former drummer Sean Reinert *and* long-time bassist Sean Malone, both of whom passed away in 2020, with co-founder, guitarist and vocalist Paul Masvidal the band's sole remaining original member and guardian of one of progressive music's most unique sounds. As the California-based virtuoso tells *Prog*, Cynic records were always destined to be a rare commodity.

"It's funny. Cynic was rooted in this idea that we would always put the music before anything, and never let the business rule our decision-making process," says Masvidal. "But look what that led to, an album every seven years! [Laughs] But we were so stubborn as children, just committed to being great musicians and giving ourselves to the work, really straddling that line. There was probably also a component that had to do with our own terror of the business, and feeling rebellion against it. Somehow it stuck over the years."

***Ascension Codes*: one of 2021's most uplifting releases.**

The abrupt departure of Sean Reinert from Cynic in 2015 looked a particularly brutal breaking-down of relations between life-long friends. The band had originally formed in Florida, as teenagers and music students, and Masvidal and Reinert's musical relationship had always been fundamental to everything they did. Losing such a close friend and creative ally could hardly fail to have a powerful effect on Cynic. But despite the fraught situation, and barely a year on from the release of *Kindly Bent To Free Us*,

Rising above: Cynic co-founder and guardian of their galaxy, Paul Masvidal.

“I think this one is probably the closest to *Focus*, especially in the guitar work. It’s the most dense guitar record Cynic’s ever made.”

Paul Masvidal found himself experiencing a rush of creative momentum, and launched straight into writing material for the *next* Cynic album. While Reinert's exit had pulled the rug from underneath the frontman's feet, music that would eventually turn up on *Ascension Codes* was starting to appear, in spite of his band's vulnerable state.

"Yeah, I don't want to go down too far into that situation with Sean and I," Masvidal says, "but I had my own gentle way of trying to part with him before he parted with me publicly. I was trying to do it lovingly, but it went in a different direction, which was a surprise, and suddenly it was chaos. But the starting point for the record was back then. We'd finished *Kindly*... and I was already demoing new material, I remember saying to the guys that the idea was to come home from touring and immediately jump into the next batch of music. So a handful of the songs on this record were demos back then. They've been gutted and reworked and I have a whole new world around them now, but they definitely existed back then."

With new ideas blooming, Masvidal kept plugging away at material for a proposed fourth album, with bassist Sean Malone and, from 2017, a new drummer, Matt Lynch, both firmly involved in the creative process. Unfortunately, events would once again conspire against Cynic, plunging the notion of the band's future into a maelstrom of uncertainty.

"We released a single [*Humanoid*] in 2018 and we were ready to hit a momentum period and go back into the new record, but then Sean's mother wasn't well and he had to leave his whole career as professor and all his academic stuff to go back to Florida to care for her. That turned into a few years, really, so that's why I made my solo acoustic records [*Mythical*, *Human* and *Vessel*], because I needed something to do. Then finally, Sean Malone moves to LA and we got back to work on it, but then it's 2020. First, Reinert died in January and then Malone went missing [he later died by suicide]. So there has been a series of these unpredictable things that just derailed the course of the record. But it's just like *Focus*. When we made that, a hurricane destroyed our rehearsal room."

"Cynic was rooted in this idea that we would always put the music before anything, and never let the business rule our decision-making process. But look what that led to, an album every seven years!"

PRESS

Despite its turbulent gestation, *Ascension Codes* is not an album weighed down by thoughts of grief. Instead, from its title upwards, the fourth Cynic album is awash with thoughts of freedom, renewal and transcendental grace, not to mention 50 minutes of glorious, impossible-to-define progressive heaviness. Masvidal explains that while new songs like *The Winged Ones* and *Mythical Serpents* are not directly addressing recent events, the album's concept digs deep into both personal and abstract themes.

"There *is* a connection to the guys, indirectly but not literally," he notes. "It's bigger than that, a broader idea. The friends I've lost were such mirrors for me my whole life, and we really forged our identities together as children, especially Reinert and I. So losing them, you start to question who you are. So this album is a journey inward. You could say it's comparable to a hero's journey, like a Joseph Campbell [author of *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 1949] kind of thing, but with a twist. It's extremely personal, but at also universal. I think those things go hand-in-hand."

While the angular, post-rockisms of *Kindly Bent To Free Us* divided opinion among Cynic admirers, *Ascension Codes* seems guaranteed to hit the spot for anyone who has ever loved this band. It would be reductive to suggest that the new material harks back to the complex and artful fusion metal of *Focus*, but it's undeniable that this is the heaviest record Cynic have made since those early days, with a few trace elements of the band's death metal past woven into the sound.

Endlessly bountiful: drummer Sean Reinert and bassist Sean Malone rehearsing in 2013.

"Oh yeah, for sure," says Masvidal. "This one is probably the closest to *Focus*, especially in the guitar work. It's the most dense guitar record Cynic's ever made. There's something about it being like coming full circle... we went back home, but in a revised way. We've always been in that progressive metal spot to a degree. This has a lot more distortion and drive and heaviness. Cynic was always *sui generis*, you know? We are a band that pulls from many sources and doesn't necessarily have one core reference point. Our choices and interests are eclectic, and they're all going into this cauldron, and that becomes the sound."

Playing alongside Masvidal on *Ascension Codes* are drummer Matt Lynch, who made his Cynic debut on

that 2018 single *Humanoid*, and keyboardist Dave Mackay. The prospect of replacing such revered musicians as Reinert and Malone would probably reduce most players to gibbering, panicked heaps, but both men deliver extraordinary performances, stamping their authority on the new material *and* honouring Cynic's exceptional body of work. Masvidal admits that he never expected to enjoy such great chemistry with anyone again, and sings his new colleagues' praises.

"Matt's an animal, man. He's one of those drummers, when I first started to hear his original ideas for this record, a lot of it went over my head. I thought, 'What are you *doing*?', because he was so different from Reinert. But over time, when I listened and I started to catch on, I realised he's the same level of monster that Reinert was. He has a real voice. You can just listen to the drums on the record and that's a complete experience."

As for Dave Mackay, Masvidal explains that they were introduced by Plini, when the Australian prog metal prodigy supported Cynic in Japan. On *Ascension Codes*, what would previously have been wildly intricate bass guitar parts are now Mackay's wildly intricate synthesiser parts.

"An interesting synchronicity is that I brought Dave in to play some gigs with me," Masvidal recalls, "and when Malone first moved to LA to start working on the record with me, we did a couple of gigs. One of the gigs, which would be Malone's very last live performance, was at a venue here in Hollywood. Mackay and Malone were onstage together with me for the last song, so they shared the stage.

"I couldn't replace Malone. So I turned a corner, and I said to [*Ascension Codes* co-producer and mixer] Warren Riker, 'How about synth? How about a keyboardist?'. A lot of moments on the record sound like amazing bass playing. You don't know what it is. So again, Dave came in with a voice, and he flows in and out of the arrangements in an extremely musical way."

It is perhaps a symptom of such complex and challenging music that Cynic albums seem always to have been difficult to make, the youthful, adrenaline-fuelled first flush of *Focus* aside. But despite the circuitous and obstacle-strewn route that Masvidal's band have taken, he still sounds driven and inspired to uphold the principles that he laid down with his friends all those years ago.

"I come back to Cynic when I feel inspired, and when I have something to say," he says. "We can't just pump this stuff out, and so each record becomes more like a masterwork for me. I always think of Ravel, when compared to other composers. Everything that he did was repertoire. Everything *mattered*. He wasn't very prolific but everything he did was really good. I've tried to stay in that mindset, that everything has to be really good. But what happens when you work that way is that every record takes *everything* out of you. You pay a price, emotionally, physically and spiritually, to make art."

Masvidal: "I come back to Cynic when I feel inspired and have something to say."

A dazzling, uplifting triumph wrenched from the jaws of despair and dismay, *Ascension Codes* is very much the equal of Cynic's previous creative highs. Meanwhile, Masvidal sounds genuinely excited about the prospect of working with both Lynch and Mackay again. He remains undecided about whether the band will ever hit the road in earnest again, but when it comes to making more Cynic music, his future manifests as a tantalising blank canvas, ripe for the painting.

"I don't know what the future holds, that's the most honest answer. Cynic is an entity now, it's beyond the personalities and the life of its members. For me, it expresses something bigger than an individual. But I'm just staying in process and seeing where things take me. You never know where the creative process is going to land. You just keep showing up."

Ascension Codes is out now via Season Of Mist. More information is at listen.cyniconline.com.

Blessed And Cursed

From playing high-octane "post-rock'n'roll" to writing the soundtrack for a horror classic, **Toundra** are one of instrumental music's most versatile bands. Now they're pushing themselves again, with an album featuring a three-part suite decrying hatred and homophobia. Esteban Girón tells us more.

Words: Matt Mills **Images:** Daniel Cruz

Look Who's back (ahem): Toundra, with Esteban Girón far left.

"I grew up in a rural town with 600 people and 2,500 cows," Toundra guitarist and co-founder Esteban Girón says with a laugh as he talks to *Prog* via Zoom. "I grew up next to animals all the time. You can see one here." He turns his webcam to the left, revealing a cat hiding behind his desk lamp. "Hi Penny," he coos.

Girón recently moved back to that natural idyll where he grew up — the green, mountainous region of Asturias in northern Spain — after spending almost 15 years amid the urban clamour of Madrid. He's settled down with his partner and, clearly, is very happy. His demeanour is the polar opposite to the emotions explored by his band's new, seventh album.

Hex consists of seven songs about hatred, anger and anxiety, and its musical urgency reflects that. While conventional post-rock bands would use extended tranquillity to build up to a mighty crescendo — adhering to the centuries-old model of classical music — Toundra emphasise cacophonous riffs and cut the filler. Listen to a song like *Ruinas* and the payoff arrives in seconds, percussion exploding into hyperactivity after a brief, ambient introduction.

However, don't be deluded into thinking this is 45 minutes' worth of knuckleheaded savagery. The emotional heart of the album is a three-part, 22-minute movement called *El Odio,* which takes up the entire first side in what, as *Prog* and Girón are talking, this writer calls Toundra's answer to *2112*.

"I always knew side A of the album was going to be just that [song]," the guitarist replies. "During one of the lockdowns, I did 30 or 40 journeys in my car to and from Madrid, and I was listening to *Tommy* by The Who a lot of times. I said, 'Okay, I don't want to do another album of seven- or eight-minute songs.' I wanted to do something different and *Tommy* was the answer. The riff in *El Odio Parte II* is pure Pete Townshend."

In English, the title of *El Odio* translates to 'the hatred', and the forms that this emotion can take and the disastrous consequences it can have are the driving force of the suite. While the band recorded *Hex* at Cal Pau Studios in Barcelona, Girón's co-guitarist, David 'Macón' López, showed him a video of people climbing a balcony to tear down and rip apart an LGBTQ+ flag, while onlookers cheered. "This is 2021," Macón said to him.

Shortly after, as Toundra finished tracking their album in the summer, they saw on the news that a gay man had been killed in a homophobic hate crime in A Coruña, in Galicia. "After that, we saw a skinhead demonstration in Madrid, in an [LGBTQ+] neighbourhood," Girón adds. "They took gay pride flags and burnt them. It scared me."

The homophobia and bigotry that Toundra witnessed unfold in 2021 all added to *El*

"I wanted to do something different and [The Who's] *Tommy* was the answer. The riff in *El Odio Parte II* is pure Pete Townshend."

Odio's message as it was being created, but the song actually dates back further, to November 2020. "We wanted to talk about how modern life is rubbish and destroys the human being," continues Girón. "It can make you sad, hate people, and make you homophobic and racist. It uses hatred to divide people and drive us like sheep to consume: buy things, buy plastic things, don't read, don't think about your future. I was thinking about this a lot."

The guitarist's disillusionment with the Western world began when, at 18, he moved from Asturias to Madrid in order to study audiovisual communication. In the capital, he sorely missed his family and rural upbringing, and began to use drink and drugs. "The hangovers were longer than the days," he recalls.

Girón formed Toundra a week before his 20th birthday, finding catharsis through instrumental music influenced equally by classical composers, vintage rock music and the chaotic hardcore of bands like Converge. "When we started Toundra," he remembers, "there was a record that I really loved by Converge, called *No Heroes*. It was Converge wanting to be Led Zeppelin. It sounded so organic. I'm a hardcore guy — I love Minor Threat — and Led Zeppelin were the band I listened to with my father. The feeling of *No Heroes* is like trying to breathe in a plastic bag. It's always been an inspiration for us."

As a result of such frenetic idols, Toundra never wanted to inhabit the meditative end of the post-rock spectrum. Their 2008 debut album established the manifesto that they'd stick to for years to come, with angular guitar chords booming over an energised rhythm section.

"During our first European tour," says Girón, "we went to Vortex, a club in Germany, and the guy from the venue told us, 'You're a post-rock band but you aren't looking at your feet — you're always looking straight ahead.' We realised we were doing something great because we love post-rock music, but we love rock'n'roll music more. I'm not in a band just to play and look at my feet — I'm gonna kick all your asses and play rock'n'roll! We love to say that we are a 'post-rock'n'roll' band."

Despite releasing five lauded albums in the space of just 10 years, it wasn't until the end of 2018 that Girón began to finally escape from the anxiety and anger he felt, as well as his substance use. He fell in love ("I think love is stronger than anger, but I don't want to sound like John Lennon!") and, a year later, he and his partner moved back to Asturias.

Toundra's next album, 2020's *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, subverted their sound, rejecting invigorating rock in favour of 70 smoother, calmer minutes. Although engrossing in its own right, it was written as a soundtrack to the classic silent horror film of the same name, commemorating its 100th anniversary that year.

"It was because of a promoter from Madrid," Girón explains. "They took classic silent cinema and mixed it with musicians playing live on stage. When I went to Madrid to study audiovisual communication, I studied that film a lot. We said, 'Okay, but we're not just going to stand onstage and play songs — we're going to write a soundtrack.' It was so stressful, I didn't want to do it again, but the rest of the guys wanted to, and to record it."

"We wanted to talk about how modern life is rubbish and destroys the human being."

When *Prog* asked the band for some hard stares we didn't mean in architectural terms.

When this writer expresses his admiration for the album, the guitarist quickly counters, "Really? You're the only one!" He explains: "For us, it's really strange to listen to that music without watching the film. We wrote it while watching the film and always played it to the film."

Hex appeal: the new album.

It'd be easy to call *Hex* a return to roots in response to the more avant-garde *Caligari*, but it's hard to imagine an effort as titanic as *El Odio* existing without that boundary-destroying precedent. Writing for what would become their seventh album started in March 2020, only days after *Caligari* came out, thanks to the lockdowns necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We were going to go to Europe," Girón remembers, "but, before going out, we said that maybe it's better to not go on tour. It was sad, but we were really stressed — we'd made seven albums in 13 years — so it was actually cool to just stop. We got to enjoy being at home."

With touring for *Caligari* having proved near-impossible, Girón is eager to hit the road in support of *Hex*. "The thing we'd love to do is a soundtrack to a new film," he also says. "Anybody, any directors who want us to do a soundtrack, phone us!"

With their career already incorporating everything from anti-homophobic post-rock to silent film playalongs, Toundra could certainly make a claim to being one of the most versatile instrumental bands in the world, delivering a widescreen vision.

Hex is out now via InsideOut. See www.toundra.es for more information.

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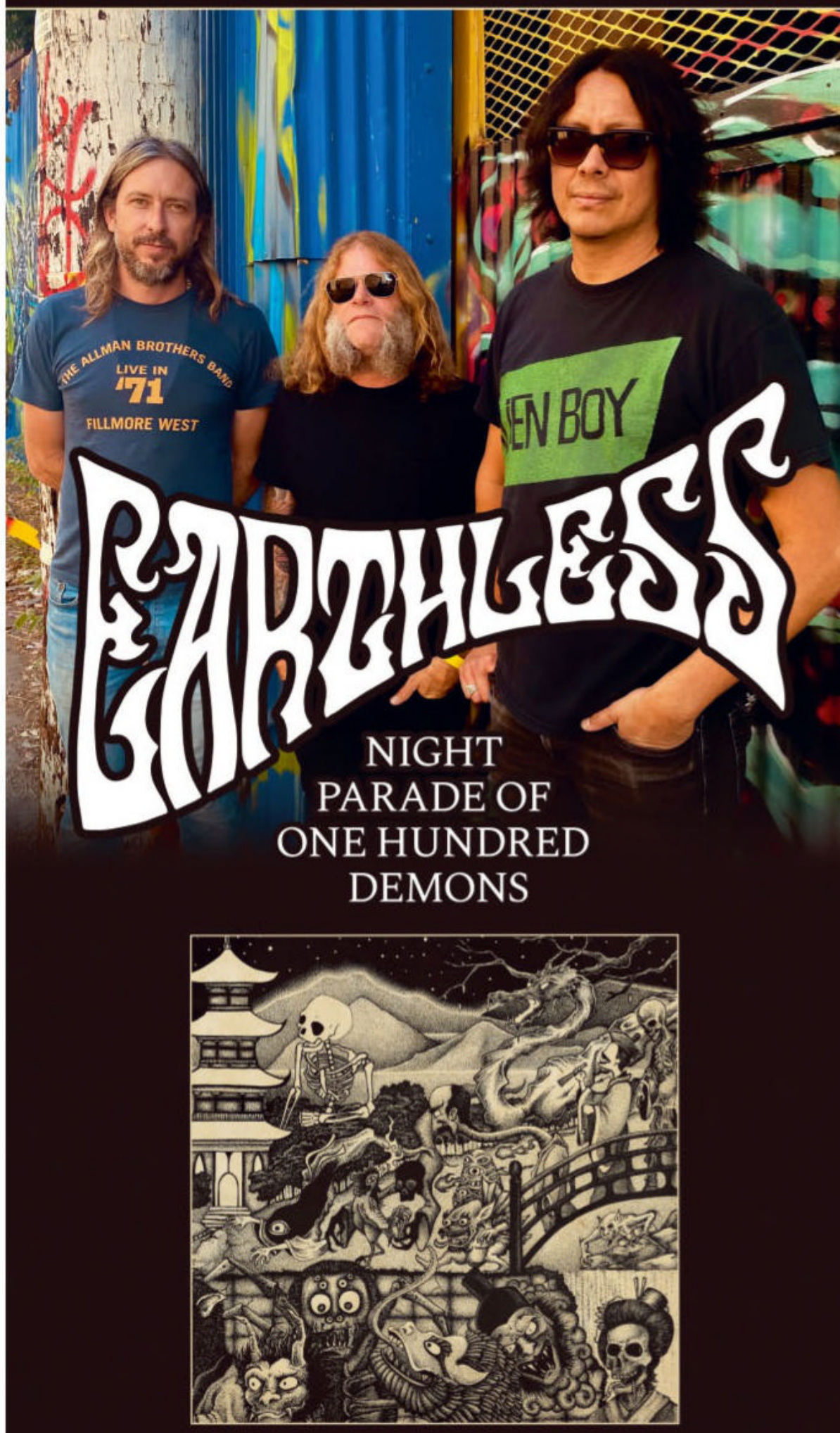

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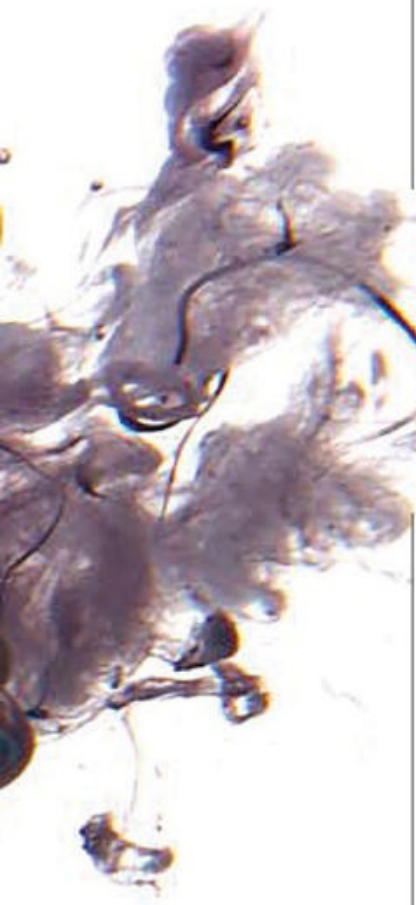
“Nothing’s sacred anymore. We want to have that mystery, and let people interpret things in their own way.”

A Glimpse Behind The Curtain

It's been 10 years since this mysterious British duo got together, mixing cinematic post-rock with breathtaking multimedia - and not forgetting those costumes. With crowdfunding now helping to bring third album *Symbiosis* to light, **Nordic Giants**' drummer-guitarist Rôka tells us more about the continuing theme of nature's influences to them, and how to remain off-grid personally and musically.

Words: Dave Everley **Images:** Neal Grundy



Nordic Giants, the most enigmatic band in modern music, would like the world to know something: they're not actually a band. "We don't even call ourselves that most of the time," says the voice on the other end of the phone, in a distinct regional British accent. "We see ourselves as an audiovisual project as much as anything."

The voice belongs to Rôka – sometimes Rôka Skuld – drummer, bowed guitar player and one half of this two-person entity. What he's saying isn't surprising. Nordic Giants don't play their intimately grandiose music so much as present it, accompanied by vivid, self-created films and costumes that suggest a pair of tribal shaman gone wild in a nature reserve.

No, what's surprising is that Rôka is saying anything at all. This is the first time either member has done an interview in this manner since they got together in 2010. Questions are usually answered via email, partly in an attempt to preserve their long-held anonymity and partly, presumably, to retain control of how Nordic Giants are presented to the world (even after our conversation, they send through a series of bullet-pointed answers to clarify and expand on what we talked about).

"Everything these days is a click away," says Rôka of their arms-length approach to the media. "Nothing's sacred anymore. We want to have that mystery, and let people interpret things in their own way. We want to let people decide what to think of it, not tell them what it means."

The decision to crack open the door just an inch, he says, was in part down to their 10th anniversary in 2021. "We don't want to give much away," cautions Rôka. "But we haven't given an interview in 10 years, and we thought it's good to share a bit of background."

Mystique may shroud Nordic Giants, but the emotional power of their music is inarguable. Their upcoming third album, *Symbiosis*, draws from the same palette of influences as 2015's *A Seance Of Dark Delusions* and 2017's *Amplify Human Vibration* – post-rock, prog, art-pop, contemporary classical music (and occasionally its vintage counter-part) - yet everything is painted bigger, bolder and brighter. If it sounds at times like it could soundtrack an epic if occasionally dark nature documentary, then that's not uncoincidental.

"Nature is one of our main influences," says Rôka. "Our symbol is a tree, we draw influences from the cycles of nature – life, death, rebirth, the Sun, the Moon." (The connection with the natural world has been there since the beginning – their 2010 debut single was titled *A Tree As Old As Me*, and subsequent releases include 2014's double EP, *Build Seas, Dismantle Suns*.)

It's not only nature that Nordic Giants are tapping into. Rôka, who doesn't own a mobile phone, says he's a voracious reader of non-fiction books on subjects ranging from music, food and education to Celtic history and UFO-ology (he references *Everything You Know Is Wrong* by 'alternative thinker' Lloyd Pye). *Symbiosis* plugs into the more esoteric side of that – opening track *Philosophy Of Mind* features the sound of an ancient Iron Age carnyx horn, while the band have said that they hope the album will "transport you to otherworldly places". The latter sounds like a reaction to being locked up for much of the last two years.

"No, not really," counters Rôka. "It's just generally in life. It's just to let people escape for a minute, in a good way or a bad way."

The basic recording of *Symbiosis*, says Rôka, was "very quick – we met up for a week initially to get all the songs ready." It was the bit beforehand that took longer. "It's not a traditional process," he says of Nordic Giants' approach to songwriting. "Songs are just built up and built up. There's a lot of tweaking. Some bands can do an album a year, but that takes a lot out of you when you've got families and all that stuff. When the time is right, the time is right. And the time was right."

Semi-regular vocal collaborators Alex Hedley and Freyja both make appearances on the album, though as with everything in the world of Nordic Giants, Rôka and Loki keep the writing and recording process completely in-house, with the exception of Dave Izumi, who was brought in to mix the album. It seems like yet another ploy to keep the mystique intact, but there are other practical reasons.

"It's not like a traditional band, where there's four people coming into a studio, who know what they're going to play, then the producer can add little bits here and there," says Rôka. "Making the music we make gets complicated."

The eight songs that appear on *Symbiosis* — the title represents "the inter-dependent relationships of life", according to Rôka — are just the tip of the iceberg. The pair whittled the final tracklisting down from 15 songs. "There were probably another 30 behind those," he says. "They just get put on the back-burner and left. We've got hundreds and hundreds of songs that have never seen the light of day and probably never will, because it's an expensive process trying to get them done."

It's odd getting even a tiny glimpse behind the curtain. After all, despite Rôka's insistence, Nordic Giants *are* fundamentally just a band — two musicians, making music, to stream, sell and recreate live. Yet that's a reductive view of what they've been doing since the beginning.

"When started, we wanted to create something different," says Rôka. "We always thought that music and film worked together well, but it had never been done before like we wanted to do it. There had never been short films and music blended into one. We wanted to put those two things together."

Unsurprisingly, Rôka isn't giving away any hard biographical details, but does suggest that his bandmate, at least, worked in the visual arts. "Loki has a background in films, with cameras," he says cagily.

Rôka himself says that he's "obsessed with films — I must've seen thousands and thousands". He mentions Quentin Tarantino and *The Royal Tenenbaums/ The Grand Budapest Hotel* director Wes Anderson as influences. "But it's not a matter of who directed it, it's the film itself — the content. Something beyond reality, which sparks the imagination. Something inventive, creative."

That chimes with Nordic Giants' approach to their own art. "We don't really come from traditional rock backgrounds," says Rôka. "We come from a wide spectrum of music — anything from orchestra and brass bands to post-rock. There's two of us, with completely different tastes. We come from opposite ends of the spectrum, and we meet in the middle somewhere."

The reference to post-rock is significant. That all-encompassing tag has been attached to Nordic Giants. Certainly, there are shared characteristics — not least the grand sweep and ever-shifting topography of their music. Yet it's a suggestion that Rôka shoots down.

"We don't want to be put into that post-rock bracket," he says firmly. "We try to stay away from all of that. "We don't listen to a lot of post-rock music — the typical ArcTanGent [Festival] bands," says Rôka. "You could list 100 bands and I'd probably know five of them. It's easy to be influenced by other bands, and it's easy to get pushed into the same flow as everything else. It's much harder to stay on the outside and be different."

He concedes that it's sometimes a challenge to keep the band's music in its own unique lane. "There are points where you think, 'Oh, that sounds like something else,'" he says. "You have to push yourself away from it, or even scrap that song."

In truth, no one's going to confuse Nordic Giants with too many of their contemporaries. The costumes and masks that they've worn in their press shots and onstage since the beginning of their career aren't just there to obfuscate who they really are. "It's just another element to set us apart from everybody else, and create this otherworld experience," says Rôka. "You see a lot of bands wearing black trousers and black T-shirts. They're wearing the same things onstage as they are offstage. Bands years ago used to put on more of a show — they'd dress up a little bit, or have costumes. We've just taken it to an extreme."

Nordic Giants' latest album, *Symbiosis*.

Nordic Giants at Bush Hall in London, November 3, 2017. Visuals are a huge part of their show.

RICHARD GRAY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

It's interesting that he refers back to the visually eye-catching approach of the great bands of the past. Despite the multimedia aspects of what they do, it indicates that Nordic Giants are aware of music's function as entertainment.

"'Entertainment' is one word," says Rôka. "Or 'theatre'. Putting effort into the show to make it something special."

Covid permitting they will be taking that multimedia theatre on the road in mid-February. It'd be nice, says Rôka, to get another album out in the not-too-distant future. "We'll see how this album goes. We're not working with a label, we're crowdsourcing the money."

Once again, it's a point where being a member of Nordic Giants seems to butt up against the realities of real life, where it becomes clear that they ultimately operate using the same rules as everybody else. Do they ever think they'll capitulate to market forces and make life easier on themselves? Focus on the music and not the films that go with it? Or maybe even perform without those arresting costumes?

"Not with Nordic Giants, no," says Rôka of the latter. "That's an intrinsic part of the show."

It sounds like he might with other bands in the future.

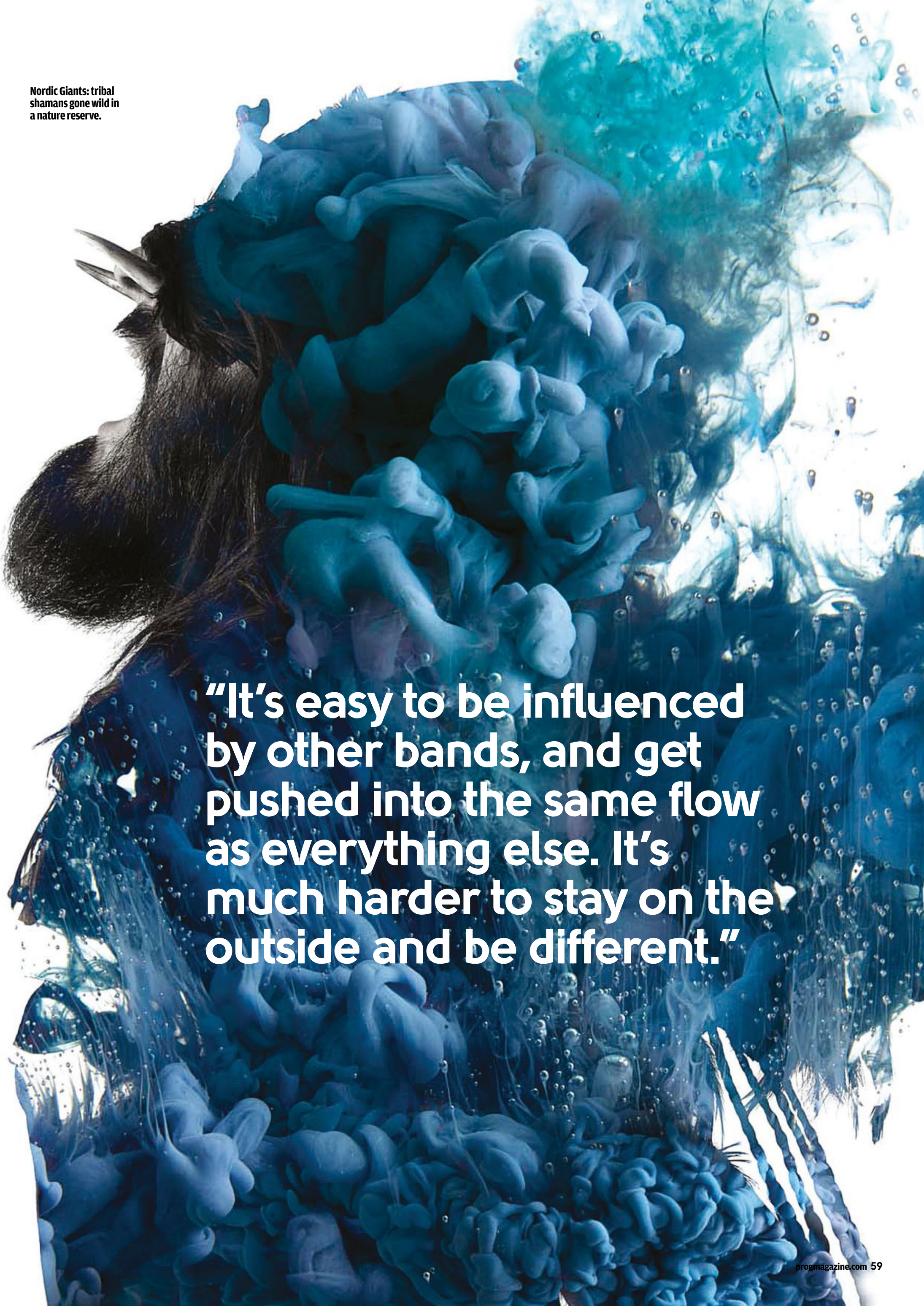
"We're always doing other things," comes the reply. "If I was playing with another band or artist, it would be stupid for me to wear the costumes."

The admission that he plays with other bands is striking. It suggests that the mystery that surrounds Nordic Giants is dense but not impenetrable and tees up the question that's been lurking in the background since the beginning of the interview: who *is* behind the masks?

"You should never ask a masked person who is behind the mask," says Rôka, with the wryness of someone who has been expecting it since the beginning. It's a predictable answer, of course, but also the right one. It wouldn't take too much detective work to uncover Nordic Giants' real identity, but that would spoil both the fun and, more importantly, the purity of what they do. Bands in black T-shirts and jeans are 10-a-penny. Bands who play epic art rock against a backdrop of striking visuals while dressed like shamans in feathered headgear aren't.

"We're always aware that a lot of bands appear, have their moment and fade away," says Rôka. "We just want to keep on rocking, as they say. We want to gradually get a bigger and bigger following, play more and more gigs. If we can keep that momentum going, we should get the freedom to do what we want, how we want."

Symbiosis is out now and Nordic Giants' tour starts February 15 at Cardiff Clwb Ifor Bach. See www.nordicgiants.co.uk.



Nordic Giants: tribal shamans gone wild in a nature reserve.

"It's easy to be influenced by other bands, and get pushed into the same flow as everything else. It's much harder to stay on the outside and be different."

Meeting Of The Minds

Matt Baber and Richard Wileman never intended to make a record together, but through a combination of serendipity, fruitful raids on their respective archives, and a natural musical chemistry they found themselves with an album. They walk *Prog* through the creation of **Baber Wileman**, from accidental conception to a finished product that's taken them both by surprise.

Words: David West

From small acorns grow lofty oaks is as apt a metaphor as any for the new album by two stalwarts of the current British prog scene, Sanguine Hum's Matt Baber and Richard Wileman from Karda Estra. The pair met back in 2011 at Kavus Torabi's north London event based around his Believers Roast label, Roastfest, which led to a collaboration on one song on Karda Estra's 2013 album *Mondo Profundo*. Then, during lockdown in early 2021, Wileman reached out to Baber to see if he'd be interested in having a listen to a song he was working on… and from that single seed gradually sprouted a whole album. "That was the joy of it really, it just happened," says Baber.

At the time, keyboardist Baber wasn't even considering making new music. Having completed Sanguine Hum's *A Trace Of Memory* in 2020, Baber says there was, "no fuel in the tank to do another album, so what was really, really nice for me was having that energy coming from Richard. There was no pressure and that allowed it to just develop into an album project. I think if Richard had written in January and said, 'Let's do an album!' I would probably have gone, 'No way.'"

Their eponymous album is a collage that pastes together prog, ambient, electronica, chamber music and even contemporary jazz. Working with no expectations or mission statement left the pair free to explore and experiment as the mood took them. "It

Richard Wileman and Matt Baber: an unplanned joy.

PRESS/RICHARD WILEMAN

was ego-free," says multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Wileman. "The music is what comes first. There was no direction. I didn't have to say anything to him because I knew he was doing his best and that's good enough. I think if you're going to collaborate, especially long distance, and you go, 'No, no, could you have done that as a guitar piece?' or 'Could you have played drums there?' or this, that and the other, if you're directing somebody like that you might as well be doing it yourself. The point of collaborating is to get their characteristics and their ideas."

From Baber's perspective, this made the creative process a very different one to writing for Sanguine Hum, where he has "a fixed idea in my head, 'it's got to sound like this', which can actually strangle the music sometimes." There was no chance of that here as ideas bounced back and forth between Baber and Wileman, each working independently in their home studios. "This was really nice for me, to just send something off that I'd partially written and go, 'I have literally no idea what's going to come back'," says Baber. "There's one example, *Three Audio Slow*, I sent this piece off to Rich and he sent back this melody that he'd added to it. The first time I heard it I went, 'Jesus, what are those notes? They're bending my ear, it's so weird.' Then the second time, 'Oh, I can hear what he's doing.' And the third time, 'I can't imagine it without those notes ever again.' It was great to get something I totally wouldn't have done myself and end up coming round to that way of thinking."

The track *Souvenir* taps into the singer-songwriter folk vibe of Wileman's solo material and began from an idea that had been sitting in Wileman's archives for 20-some years. "It had a Europop beat at one point and then it became a waltz. That's gone through all sorts of permutations," he says. "I knew I wanted Matt to have his fingerprint on it. I only sent him half of it and he took the central section and wrote a new piano part to it. I loved the idea that the song has the theme of a lullaby in it, and the piano part, whether he knew it or it's a happy accident, has a lullaby feel."

Passing Wave, by contrast, is a very contemporary crossover between electronica and jazz with its bubbling synthesiser and ambient soundscape offset against improvised jazz drums. Much like *Souvenir*, it began with an incomplete idea that had been gathering dust waiting for its moment in the sun. "That was one of a batch of things I'd done," says Baber. "I thought, 'I'm just going to do something with no idea what it's for,' and I set my synthesiser going on this repeating pattern, sat on the kit and drummed along to it. I was imagining myself as Jack DeJohnette on a 70s ECM session. It sat on the hard drive for a year or so." As it began to dawn on both musicians that they might have the makings of an EP or even an album, they met up in a pub. But Baber wasn't sure if his drumming/synth sketch was too esoteric to fit with what they'd created thus far. "It was stylistically miles away from everything else," he says. "I think two things made it work in the record. One was what Richard did, which was more of an ambient approach, so he put some textures

The day jobs. Sanguine Hum in 2018 and, below, Karda Estra in 2000. Richard Wileman had ideas that Karda Estra might become a live entity; it never did, but this is the line-up it would have been: L-R Caron Hansford, Zoe King, Richard Wileman, Ileesha Bailey.

PRESS/SANGUINE HUM

PRESS/RICHARD WILEMAN

"I'll often look at out-of-copyright poetry and grab lines or take a phrase and turn it upside-down."
Richard Wileman

Richard Wileman with Amy Fry, who guests on the new album (vocals and clarinet).

PRESS/RICHARD WILEMAN

on top of it, which tied it to a lot of the other things on the record — it made it feel like sonically it was in the same world. And where I plonked it in the sequencing of the record was like reaching this halfway point of something different happening right where you need it, like a plot twist in a film. I don't often get to drum on records, so it was nice to get that on there. That was one of the ones I had the biggest question mark on, but I sit back and listen to it now, and I'm really pleased with how it came out."

Emperor is a lush arrangement of interweaving melody lines from piano and guitar, while the lyrics came out of an idea that Wileman had for a solo album about reincarnation. "I'll often look at out-of-copyright poetry and things like that, and grab lines or take a phrase and turn it upside-down," says Wileman. "If they've written about the sea, I'll change it to the land, but maybe I'll get choice words out of there that I'd never use myself and they can help. The word 'emperor' came from a poem. I just liked the idea that we're all in the same boat, we'll all reach the end of the line at some point. I was reading a poem that had an emperor in it and that was a good way to say not even an emperor will escape." Wherever the source of inspiration, for Wileman it all comes down to serving the music. "I'll happily rip a good line up if it needs a simpler word and if it sounds better," he says. "I'm not especially precious about the lyrics as long as they work with the song."

The Baber Wileman project is strictly a studio-based affair, although Wileman says he may rearrange some of the songs for solo gigs but creating their unplanned album has been creatively reinvigorating for both men, a much-needed tonic to the boredom of lockdown, and a chance to breathe new life into some ideas from the vaults. The track *2009* is so-called because "it's on a floppy disc from 2009", says Baber. He had the beginnings of a song and couldn't see how to develop it, but there such a powerful sense of trust between the two musicians that Baber knew Wileman could unlock the song's potential. "That was a joy hearing that come back with this full chamber arrangement of the guitar and the woodwinds," says Baber. "Same with *The Birth Of Spring*, it was a little piano thing that had been knocking around for years and years and just getting back this vocal was like, 'That's what it needed for all of these years!' It was the sense of getting something back and going, 'Ah, it's been completed — brilliant!'"

Baber Wileman is out now on Believers Roast. tinyurl.com/b-roast for more info

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Old Dogs, New Fangs

Since 1984's *To The Death!* demo, Canada's progressive metal veterans **Voivod** have built their songs out of winding improvisations and free-wheeling jam sessions. When the pandemic took those away from them, the band were forced to adapt their songwriting process. Their latest album, *Synchro Anarchy*, is the sound of that adaptation. A record full of darkness, dystopia and devilment, drummer Michel 'Away' Langevin reveals how unfamiliar territory helped the band create one of their finest albums yet.

Words: Phil Weller **Images:** Catherine Deslauriers

“That mixture of building demos on a computer and finally jamming the thing live in the studio is what made this new album sound different.”

“When we were in the studio, a drum pattern came to my mind, so I stood up to go to the drum riser to show it to the guys. I tripped over my shoelace and almost fell over the drum kit.” Voivod drummer Michel ‘Away’ Langevin is talking about what seemed a fairly unimportant moment in the studio that turned out to be vital in bringing the band’s 15th album, *Synchro Anarchy* to life. “It was pretty funny because the pattern I had in mind kept skipping a beat. It triggered an idea in [vocalist] Snake’s mind where, say you stop for a second to tie up your shoe and then a car whizzes by and misses you when it would have otherwise hit you if you hadn’t stopped to tie your shoelace, your life is saved by a strange coincidence. Snake started writing lyrics and in them he had the words ‘synchro’ and ‘anarchy’ and in the way that we put the album together during a pandemic, while trying to make sense of everything, it felt like the perfect title.”

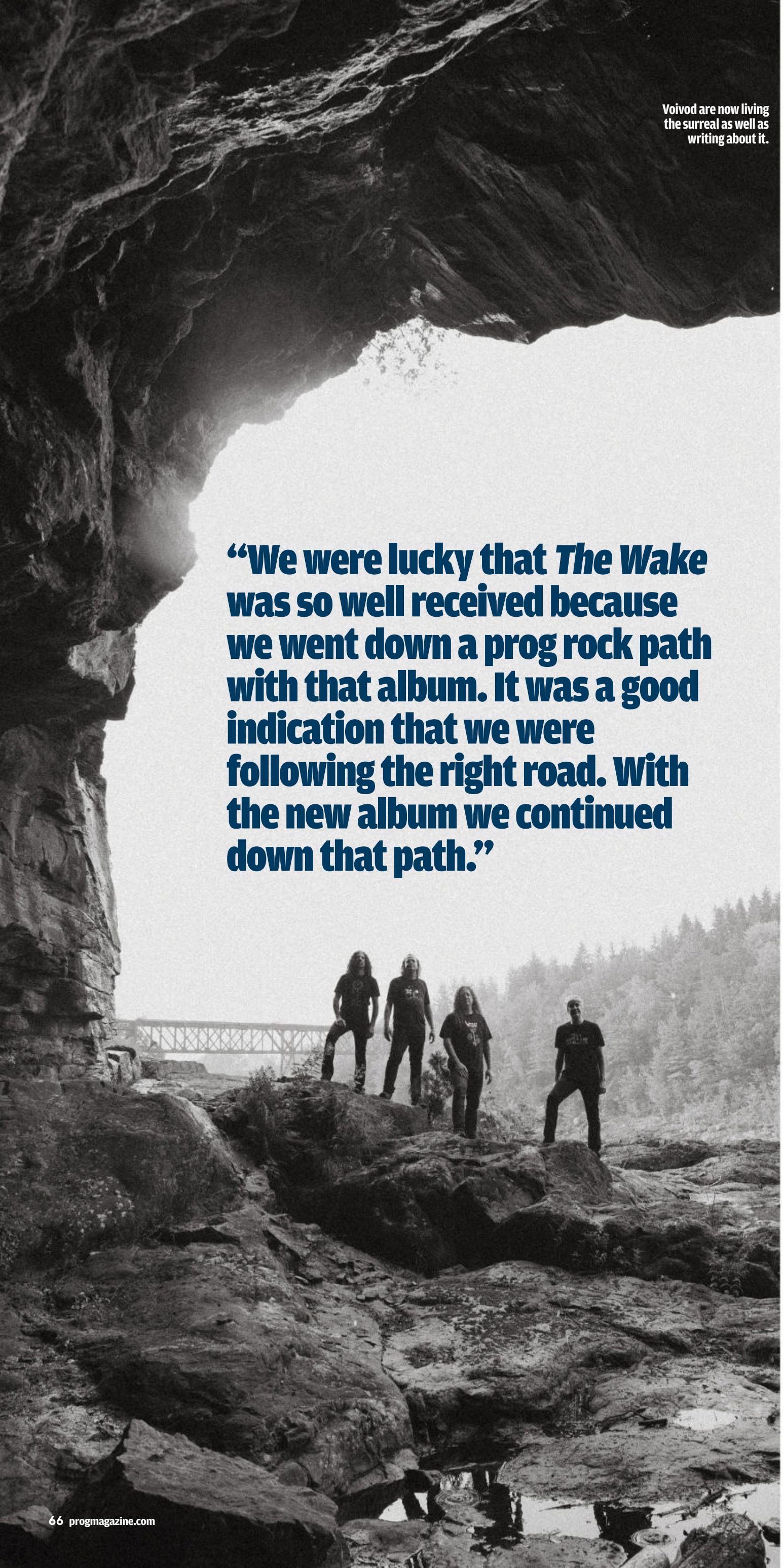
L-R: Daniel ‘Chewy’ Mongrain, Denis ‘Snake’ Bélanger, Michel ‘Away’ Langevin and Dominique ‘Rocky’ Larouche.

2018’s *The Wake* had found Voivod in inspired form and it had fuelled their confidence going into its successor. It won them the Juno Award for best metal album and it, ultimately, proved to the world that the band, who helped sculpt and pioneer progressive metal three decades ago, still had fire in their bellies. Fresh blood had helped stoke those flames, with longstanding members Langevin and Denis ‘Snake’ Bélanger now joined by Dominique ‘Rocky’ Laroche on bass and guitarist Daniel ‘Chewy’ Mongrain on what was only his second full-length effort with the band since joining in 2008. They were all geared up to begin writing its follow-up. Then the pandemic ground their writing sessions to a halt.

“In early 2020 we started jamming and recording improvisations. Chewy had bits of riffs he’d written during the GWAR tour we did in Europe and Snake came with melodies in his head too. So we had bits of ideas, but then all of a sudden we were shut off from the jam room. It was frustrating,” Langevin reveals with that stress audible in his voice. He adds that the band were “forced to sync up online”. But in those challenging times, change for the better was to be found, lurking amid a tangle of uncertainty.

“Everything became very surgical for me; I started paying lots more attention to the beats and the riffs. I was trying to create ideas that I’d never done before. At first, I started to work on ideas I had that were in the same time signature or had the same BPM and a few songs were built like that. After a while, though, I started mixing bits of songs that we had in our bank of unused ideas that had no connection to each other at all, which was something I’d never have done in the jam room.

“Slowly but surely we were able to go back into the studio to start rehearsing again,” he continues. “This was a great moment where all our ideas really glued together. That was where we realised that a part could be doubled or cut and so on. The energy of everybody coming together again brought a new element to what we’d created online. We actually ended up speeding up



Voivod are now living the surreal as well as writing about it.

“We were lucky that *The Wake* was so well received because we went down a prog rock path with that album. It was a good indication that we were following the right road. With the new album we continued down that path.”

most of the songs we had demoed. Everything got much more powerful. So, I think that mixture of building demos on a computer and finally jamming the thing live in the studio is what made this new album sound different; the whole process actually became a very positive two-part thing.”

What followed was a “marathon summer” of putting these songs together with a newly imposed and impending deadline staring them dead in the eye.

“It was super-intense,” Langevin reflects with a sigh of retrospective exhaustion. “When we were confronted with a deadline from the label we realised that we still had a lot of work to do to deliver the album on time. It turned out to be a real intense marathon over the summer of writing, fixing stuff and recording as well as playing festivals here in Quebec on the weekends. There was a point where Chewy, who is the main arranger for the band, was running out of ideas, so we all started throwing whatever we had at him. That’s when the shoelace incident happened. Writing like that brought everyone’s personality into the album more so than ever before, I think. Everybody was helping each other and it became a really collaborative effort.”

Synchro Anarchy picks up where *The Wake* left off. It further develops the modern Voivod template, which tactfully throws back to the band’s 80s and 90s peaks while adding freshness to the mix. Across its nine tracks, thrash metal grit and heavy-duty riffs ornamented each track’s avant-garde architecture, with Denis ‘Snake’ Bélanger’s thought-provoking lyrics swinging from the ceiling. It sounds like Voivod but modernised; revitalised.

“It was a lot of hard work and not much sleep, really,” Langevin extends. “It must have been quite a ride for Chewy because there was there was a lot of work for him.”

Mongrain is a lifelong Voivod fan. His passion and creativity for not just technical, neck-breaking guitar work but also complex, thought-provoking song arrangements comes coupled with a real understanding of what Voivod is. Having forged a name for himself in another Quebec-based band — the death metal-pedalling Martyr — he had brief stints in two more death metal acts in Gorguts and Capharnaum before he took the songwriting reins of his favourite band.

It would’ve been a fairy-tale moment for the now-45-year-old, had he not been taking the place of Denis ‘Piggy’ D’Amour. Piggy, a founding member of the band and a legendary guitarist, had been responsible for much of the band’s most iconic material, so Mongrain had enormous shoes to fill. Yet it’s a responsibility he’s handled with

esteem. His endearment of the band, alongside his own style that offered a fresh perspective without muddying the waters, has helped define their sharp modern edge.

"Chewy is a fan of all the Voivod eras and there are elements of all those in his playing, but with a futuristic twist," Langevin believes. "Our sound is more like fusion metal in a way now, with Snake and I bringing the punk and trashy elements into the fold."

But of the band's "futuristic twist", Langevin feels it has been a sub-conscious change, rather than a ripping-up of the rule book.

"We don't sit down and over-think it," he says. "With Voivod we always try to create music that we enjoy playing live. We were lucky that *The Wake* was so well received because we went down a prog rock path with that album. It was a good indication that we were following the right road. So with the new album we continued down that path."

For Langevin, meanwhile, the marathon summer wasn't just about nailing the songs.

"When I was finally done with recording my parts I realised I still had to do to the artwork, and the layout, and everything else. I was always drawing ideas while the rest of the band were recording their parts and we were building the album together. I actually ended up having a lot of art for the booklet of the new album, which is great. It was a very creative time for all of us.

"When I hear the album now, I can feel the urgency," the drummer adds.

Come on, lads, there's plenty of room to social distance...

***Synchro Anarchy* is out on February 11.**

"Having to deliver and play the best we can made the album more raw. We didn't go for interludes and all that other stuff that we've done in the past; it's a single vinyl record and everything is very compact. It feels very 'in the moment'."

Aiding in that mad dash summer was producer Francis Perron of RadicArt Studio, who mixed 2016's *Post Society* EP and has stayed on since. With this being his third studio release with the band, Perron — who was also tasked with overseeing the lockdown livestreams the band presented last year — has become an integral cog in the contemporary Voivod machine.

Says Langevin: "The studio is in an isolated village outside of Quebec where there's nothing else to do but work on the album. Ever since we went there for *Post Society* I've always thought it to be the best surroundings and the best way of working. Francis brings a lot into the mix and he works as hard as we do in making it happen, which is why we'll keep going there."

While locked in the studio, the Covid pandemic may have seemed like just a memory, but it lived on in Snake's words.

"With his lyrics, Snake is always very inspired by what's happening around him. I think the pandemic had a big influence on the lyrics, even if he doesn't talk about it directly. This is an album of individual songs, but there's a sense of darkness and isolation connecting all his lyrics."

Indeed, for a band who have always engulfed themselves in dystopian lyrical themes and sci-fi dreaming they now found themselves not just writing about the surreal, but living it too.

"These are dark times and they're reflected in the lyrics; I think you can really feel it." And he's right. From the snarl and spit of *Planet Eaters* to the blunt force clangour of *Quest For Nothing*, which marries a sense of frustration with malevolent hopelessness, you feel it like sandpaper on an open wound. They reflect the unease and anxiety that has marked these past two years. These *are* dark times, but it's in times like these bands like Voivod thrive. It's no surprise to hear, then, that they've plenty more in the pipeline.

"We've been working a lot on the new album, of course, but we've also been working on vinyl reissues of the old catalogue and we also have a documentary on the way," Langevin goes on to reveal. "It's called *We Are Connected* and it's by [filmmaker] Felipe Belalcazar [*Death By Metal*, *Metal Evolution*]; that's going to come out this year. And we are expecting to do a world tour when the album comes out too. So 2022 is going to be a pretty big year for us, and in 2023 we'll have our 40th anniversary, so that will also be a big year with a book release and everything else.

"We always try to be as productive as we can really and that's why last year, instead of sitting in our living rooms doing nothing, we decided to put out live releases and build a new album, even if we had to do it online."

Synchro Anarchy is out February 11 via Century Media. See www.voivod.com.

CREATION

Myths

US proggers **Wilderun** continue their journey of creating expansively gorgeous but sometimes brutal orchestral progressive music with fourth album *Epigone* – and it could be their darkest, most folk-summoning yet.

Words: Dom Lawson **Images:** Tom Couture

Once in a blue, progressive moon, a band comes along who have so much going for them that it seems inconceivable that they won't conquer the world. After a couple of well-received underground releases that showcased a wildly imaginative and folky take on the prog metal formula, Wilderun independently released their third album, *Veil Of Imagination*, in November 2019. It was, and remains, an utterly mind-blowing piece of work, wherein Opeth's elegant grandeur collided with Cardiacs' quasi-classical crescendos and some of the most imperious, tech metal showboating yet committed to hard drive. Not surprisingly, Wilderun were swiftly snapped up by a discerning record label, Century Media, and *Veil Of Imagination* was given a second crack at the whip via a lavish re-release, which also now included an audacious cover of Iron Maiden's *Seventh Son Of A Seventh Son*. Unfortunately, despite clearly having the wind in their sails and a deafening buzz in their ears, Wilderun's quest for world domination was stopped firmly in its tracks.

"We signed with Century Media in February 2020, and it was a few weeks after that that the world shut down," guitarist/orchestrator Wayne Ingram tells *Prog*. "So being able to re-release something and then *not* being able to support it with live shows was a disappointment, because usually that's how things go, right? There was a feeling that we didn't get to promote *Veil*... to its full potential. Now we're playing live again and we're playing stuff from *Veil Of Imagination*, so it's a belated celebration of the whole thing. In the long run it all worked out!"

Fortunately, as Ingram cheerfully admits, Wilderun are a band with vast enthusiasm for the recording process. Denied the chance to tour, the Bostonites simply threw themselves into making their next album. It's called *Epigone*, and it's another meticulously constructed and genuinely astounding piece of inspirational progressive metal. Constructed around songs written by frontman and guitarist Evan Anderson Berry, the new album is somehow even more ambitious than its predecessor, and with even more of the lush orchestrations and multi-layered

Wilderun: creating epics from thin air.

"I know that something I was very focused on was having a consistent sonic footprint for the record."

Taking a short break from Skype...

extravagance that made *Veil Of Imagination* such a jaw-dropping surprise.

"Generally it all starts with Evan, most of the material comes from his songwriting," says Ingram. "That's the *kernel* of it all. Evan will have a bunch of songs that he's written, then he records some guitar demos to share with us so we can all hear what he's come up with. Then after Evan does some initial, internal revising for himself, each of us will take the demos and we'll have long meetings over Skype about how to orchestrate the thing. These conversations go on for five or six hours, you know? There are pages and pages of notes! [Laughs]."

Despite sounding very much like an authentic orchestra, the strings and brass that lift Wilderun's new songs to such giddy heights are all created and arranged on computer, by the band themselves. From the delicate haze of strings that envelops acoustic opener *Exhaler* to the roof-raising peaks and troughs of *Woolgatherer*'s synapse-battering 14 minutes, *Epigone* is an album of almost outrageous lushness. Wayne Ingram — who's previously worked with soundtrack god Hans Zimmer — was charged with knocking the album's many orchestral flourishes into shape, and his pride in his own work is understandable.

"I was very focused on having a consistent sonic footprint for the record," he notes. "For instance, on *Veil...*, it was always an orchestra, but the *sound* of it was changing over the course of songs, because we were using different sound libraries and switching between them. On this record, I very purposefully created a template for an orchestral sound, so I layered a bunch of things and made the sound that I wanted for the record, and I used *only* that sound. So all the brass, the strings, the woodwind and all that stuff, they're all the same on every song. It gives the album a more linear feel, because it flows easily and the sounds are flowing consistently too."

New album *Epigone* is out now.

Although not a concept album in the strictest sense, *Epigone* is certainly a record designed to be listened to in one sitting, and one that vividly conjures the highs and lows of some nebulous emotional odyssey. This time around, Evan Anderson Berry's lyrical focus is on the creative process itself, and on the trials and tribulations that so often come with a life dedicated to conjuring something from nothing.

"Essentially, a lot of the lyrics deal with the struggle to be creative, the romanticising of the starving artist cliché, and all the troubles and blockades you encounter when you're trying to create," says Ingram. "It's not necessarily a concept album, but every song deals with certain aspects of the creative process, including the assumption people make that it must be *awesome* to be creative all the time. What people sometimes don't realise is that creativity is a rechargeable resource and a renewable resource, but it's not an *ever-present* resource. It ebbs and flows."

Speaking of ebb and flow, *Epigone* is an absolute masterclass in dynamics. *Veil Of Imagination* was a similarly diverse and adventurous record, but the new material exhibits a sense of space and subtlety that surpasses anything Wilderun have done before. Most notably, *Epigone* begins with *Exhaler*: a beautiful, psychedelic folk song that defies prog metal's usual conventions of instant, bombastic gratification.

"We had chats about what we were going to do with synths and the orchestra, and the whole idea was that the album would start with this very beautiful and lush-sounding folk thing. Then at the end of the song, Evan described it as if you were starting off in this wonderful frame of mind, but right at the beginning of *Woolgatherer*, you know that something really *weird* is going on! [Laughs] That's the beauty of being able to have these long talks together, because not only can we talk about what we're going to do musically, we can also talk about the intent behind it. There's always an emotional reason why we're composing something. There's a *deeper* reason."

Scheduled for release right at the start of 2022, *Epigone* emerged into a slightly more optimistic world than its re-released forebear. Pleasingly, Wilderun have already managed to squeeze in a few North American gigs as support to Swallow The Sun, debuting material from both *Veil Of Imagination* and *Epigone* in the process. Judging by the flurry of high-spirited updates the band have been posting to social media, the shows were a great success. Nonetheless, Ingram is hesitant to make any bold predictions about how much touring Wilderun will now be able to do.

"We're touring *now*, but with the live thing, I just always think of it as up-in-the-air, you know? It's unpredictable, touring. But, fortunately, we have a really attentive manager, who is constantly looking for opportunities for us. We're making connections and hopefully those will garner us future opportunities to do live stuff. Hopefully we'll be able to go out and tour again in the summer. I'm cautiously optimistic. Times are weird and it's hard to predict."

Easier to predict is that *Epigone* is going to blow a lot of people's heads off. For Ingram and his comrades, the album's release marks the real start of their campaign to win hearts and minds. And if all those plans for touring this year fail to come to fruition, these diehard creatives will be perfectly happy to return to the studio to make another record. Conquering the world can wait a little while longer, right?

"We're definitely discussing the next record already. We're throwing around a lot of different ideas. *Epigone* is probably one of the most sonically and harmonically dense records we've made, so we're talking about what we can do differently. What textures can we change up to make things different? You can rest assured that the focus for the next record is to continue to be innovative and not to repeat ourselves. I'm sure that focus will guide us to some cool new place!"

Epigone is out now via Century Media.
See www.wilderun.com for more information.

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With some vital new blood bolstering their line-up, rising British prog rockers **The Paradox Twin** are daring to dream. Here the band's founder Danny Sorrell and co-vocalist Nicole Johnson take us inside their latest album, *Silence From Signals,* and reveal the deeply personal concept behind it.

Words: Chris Cope **Images:** Will Ireland

Aiming High

Danny Sorrell's pretty matter of fact about it. "My dream is to play a sold-out Royal Albert Hall. That's the plan. I think we'll get there. We just need to keep doing what we're doing. We're obviously doing the right things at the moment."

He has a point. The Paradox Twin's vocalist, guitarist and founder is speaking shortly after the release of their well-received second album, *Silence From Signals*. Whereas the English quintet's first album, 2018's *The Importance Of Mr Bedlam*, explored conspiracy theories, the new one is much more personal. During the writing process Sorrell found himself "ripping his soul out" to put the story into words.

Drawing on his own family life experience, the record pivots around two twins — a neuro-typical sister and a neurodivergent brother — and explores the brother's struggle through life. Sorrell himself has an autistic son, and his co-vocalist in the band, Nicole Johnson, also has a son with autism, and she's currently pursuing diagnosis for her other two children.

"It's a fictional story," Sorrell explains, "but it was very heavily influenced by my son, and obviously the fact that Nicole has got kids the same. It just kind of drove me. When I was writing it I was in a bit of an emotional state, so that's where my head was at the time. The music just poured out of me over a space of six to eight months. When I listen back to it now it gives me goosebumps, because I'm listening back to where I was when I was writing."

Musically, *Silence From Signals* is moulded by The Paradox Twin's trademark sound. It's not 'busy' prog; there's none of the genre's more indulgent, self-gratifying excesses. Instead, the atmospheric, often melancholic rock

"When I was writing it I was in a bit of an emotional state. The music just kind of poured out over a space of six to eight months."

Danny Sorrell

rendered here echoes acts like Steven Wilson and Anathema. Whether on the powerful *Wake Vortex*, the dreamy *Sea Of Tranquility* or beautiful *I Am Me. I Am Free,* the classy twin vocals truly shine throughout, with Johnson making her striking album debut for the band.

She actually joined back in 2019, after responding to an advert Sorrell placed for an extra vocalist. "I just remember not really knowing what I was letting myself in for," Johnson recalls. "I just took a punt, sent him my demo reel — the stars aligned, really."

Johnson describes herself as a "geek", with sci-fi, time travel and being a "raging feminist" among her interests. She grew up in the US before making her move to Reading, and while Sorrell's musical roots lay more in rock, hers come from elsewhere. "I'm a fourth-generation jazz musician," she explains. "My father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all jazz musicians in California. I was brought up in the conservative gospel music tradition in church. Then in school I did the musical ensembles and vocal ensembles, choir competitions, and one-to-one vocal tuition too."

She also got into folk music, and for eight years toured as a backing singer in a rock'n'roll tribute band. "I'm really just musically interested and eclectic," she says. "And if there's a new project, I'm interested and I want to have a go, which means that over time my voice has been trained in lots of different directions. That's what you hear on the album."

As on the rousing chorus of *Wake Vortex*, Johnson soars on *Silence From Signals*, and has helped to catapult The Paradox Twin to the next level. The times being what they are, the album suffered numerous delays and took around 18 months to make, and Johnson thinks the music reflects its arduous birth. "This album would have sounded completely different if we'd gone ahead and done the original timeline," she says. "What is going to filter in is [...] how the pandemic affected all of this. You're hearing that sound of frustration, of being held back. I personally can hear that in everybody's playing."

In their performance and compositions, The Paradox Twin sit on the edge of contemporary prog. Haken singer Ross Jennings is a fan, and Sorrell is very happy to name-check influences like Steven Wilson and Opeth. But it's the genre's conceptual aspect that really appeals to him. "I enjoy writing a story when it comes to an album," he says. "It's got to be a compelling story, and the music has to fit in with the emotion. A good song has to have feeling to it — it's got to grab you. If I like a song [...] it's like a hand going into your gut and pulling it out — that's what I feel like!

"My favourite part of songwriting is creating strange sounds. All the sounds on the record are stuff I've merged stuff together. The weird chant on *Wake Vortex* — that's actually me, but I've recorded it through a kid's toy, put it into software, and then processed the hell out if it."

Johnson may leave the surreal sound design to Sorrell, but she shares his sense of story, and when it came to recording her parts for the album she wanted to get involved: "It wasn't just me putting together these notes. I wanted to sit behind that and think about how to really convey that emotion."

Completed by guitarist Leland Freeman, bassist Diane Fox and drummer Graham Brown, the talented quintet are signed to John Mitchell and Chris Hillman's White Star Records, which continues to solidify its place as a hub for emerging British prog rock. Sorrell's constantly writing new music, and reckons fresh material will follow later this year, namely an EP building on the storyline of *Silence From Signals*.

It'll be another small yet meaningful step towards realising that lofty ambition to fill the Royal Albert Hall. It's a dream shared by his bandmates, and as ideas are floated for album three, you get the feeling The Paradox Twin's stock is only going to rise.

"I think we do have scope for taking this really very far," adds Nicole Johnson. "The music itself is amazing. People were listening to it, people who have known me since I was a kid, and they were like, 'Wait, what?!'"

And then there's the album's important, hot-topic subject matter, inspired by Sorrell's family life, and reflecting Johnson's own too; the stars aligning, indeed. "Danny's really done something quite brave," she says, "in reaching in and starting a dialogue that is long overdue. I think that if it goes in the right place at the right time we have a real opportunity to help a lot of families. It's not just about the music — it's the story that we have told."

Silence From Signals is out now on White Star Records. More details can be found at www.theparadoxtwin.com. For information on autism, head to www.autism.org.uk

Decree

Nice Guy

The Flower Kings, L-R: Michael Stolt, Jonas Reingold, Mirko DeMaio, Roine Stolt, Hasse Fröberg, Zach Kamins.

"[My brother] Michael was about 16 when I drafted him into my band Fantasia in 1979… With our common musical history I can say, 'Remember that Joni Mitchell album where Jaco Pastorius plays this nice little thing?', and he knows instantly. And we can talk about Chris Squire's bass sound on *Awaken*, things like that."

Now the dust has settled on Transatlantic's long-awaited comeback, Roine Stolt is back with his main band, **The Flower Kings**. New double album *By Royal Decree* reunites the founder with original band member, and brother, Michael. We discuss their new material, the upcoming reissues campaign and why Stolt's keeping an open mind on the future. **Words:** Grant Moon **Images:** Lilian Forsberg

Roine Stolt has been reheating some of his old music of late. He's been working 15-hour days in the lead-up to both the release of The Flower Kings' sprawling new double album, *By Royal Decree*, and the impending reissue campaign that will eventually see the band's entire back catalogue back in print. That's where the cooking comes in.

"I have the old reel-to-reel tapes," Stolt tells *Prog* from his studio in Uppsala, Sweden. "They degrade over time, so what you do is put them in the oven. I know it sounds weird, but you sort of bake them for about 24 hours on a low temperature, and that makes it possible to play the reels again. Then you can transfer the tracks to the digital medium, and from there you can do anything. But it's like a Cinderella thing – you can only play them once after baking them. Then they start to fall apart."

So far he has delivered remasters of the band's 1995 debut, *Back In The World Of Adventures*, and the follow-up, *Retropolis*. He already had the stems – the separate master tracks – for those records backed up onto hard drives, but as we speak to him those old reels for *Stardust We Are* (1997) and *Flower Power* ('99) are being lovingly prepared, in the Stolt family cooker.

Stolt's home studio is well equipped for the remastering task, but one thing he can't do (as Marillion discovered recently with their *Fugazi* reissue) is remove the albums' heavy compression, something that was in vogue in the 80s and early 90s. "That's the way everybody did things back then," he says with a knowing sigh. "I was totally in love with David Foster's production of The Tubes' *The Completion Backward Principle* [1981], and even Frankie Goes To Hollywood. Trevor Horn's production I mean, *that's* some heavy compression! Even on Grace Jones' wonderful *Slave To The Rhythm* — when I really need to listen to something for pure sound quality, that's the album I put on. So, I can't change the compression on the albums, but I can rearrange the EQ, make the kick drum a little fuller, make the cymbals less harsh. They sound much better now, I think."

By the time those four early Flower Kings records first appeared, Stolt had already played in Swedish band Kaipa as a teenager in the 70s, his own group Fantasia into the 80s, and had a solo career too before forming The Flower Kings in '94. Since then he's played with Karmakanic, Agents Of Mercy and prog supergroup Transatlantic, and he's worked with the big-name prog artists Jon Anderson and Steve Hackett, and all along he has written music copiously, and archived it all. So when it came time to make *By Royal Decree* last year, Stolt — who's 65 now — had plenty of material to sift through.

"I write *a lot*," he says, "and I try to at least give each idea a chance without being too critical in the first place, then I just save it. Back in the day it was on cassettes, even reel-to-reel, burned onto CDs, and of course nowadays it's MP3 files. So I just went through all my old demos, I'd get inspired by something, and I'd start developing that. Looking at the songs I did back in the old days, I was in a different space. I wrote a little bit differently, so my basic idea was to take those [older] ideas and develop them now, in the way I write today."

By turns beautiful, melodic and densely proggy, *By Royal Decree* is a typically expansive Flower Kings album, packed with those unearthed, revitalised snippets from the past. The symphonic opener, *The Great Pretender*, comprises some melodic fragments demoed by Stolt in the mid-90s, now flowing smoothly into newly written sections. Parts of the baroque, upbeat rocker *Revolution* date back even further. "The final part of the song was developed later," he explains, "but the basics were written in 1992. Then there's [clever, hooky mid-tempo tune] *The Soldier*, which is from very early in The Flower Kings days, but with new parts to get the song over the finish line."

A more recent composition, the haunting, piano-led *Moth* was mooted for Transatlantic's last album, *The Absolute Universe*, but for reasons clearly unrelated to quality, it went unused. Not that this record's all prog bombast though. The breezy and positive *We Can Make It Work* harks back to 10cc or The Beatles; *A Million Stars* is a radio-friendly mid-tempo ballad. "They're simple," Stolt agrees. "I really like that kind of thing too. Then something like *The Great Pretender* is put together with lots of different parts and segments, in true progressive rock style. When we do progressive rock, there's no rules — we just keep writing, keep putting together whatever parts we like."

That 'we' this time is, once again, Stolt's regular Flower Kings co-vocalist Hasse Fröberg, keyboardist Zach Kamins and drummer Mirko DeMaio. These latter two young recruits joined up for 2019's *Waiting For Miracles* and have brought a new creative charge to the veteran band, making their presence clearly felt on the band's 2020 lockdown album, *Islands*.

The live line-up, without the very busy Jonas Reingold.

This time however, the bassist's chair is a revolving one. The band's usual player, Jonas Reingold, is present, but when it comes to live activities, Stolt says bluntly that, "Jonas can't be in the band anymore. He's the bass player with Steve Hackett nowadays, and we cannot adjust The Flower Kings' activities waiting for Jonas. When everything opens up, hopefully Steve will be touring, and touring heavily."

That said, there's no bad blood — Reingold still plays on half of *By Royal Decree*. He shares bass duties with Stolt's younger brother, Michael. He was in the band for those first four albums, before leaving in '99 and going on to perform with some of Sweden's high-profile homegrown artists, such as Tomas Ledin and Carola Häggkvist. Michael will be joining The Flower Kings on tour in Sweden in March, for Cruise To The Edge in May and — fingers crossed — other forthcoming 2022 shows too.

As a kid he would sit with his elder brothers Roine and Pierre and soak up their album collection — Zappa, Crimson, Weather Report, Vanilla Fudge. "Michael was about 16 when I drafted him into my band Fantasia in 1979," Roine recalls. "He's family, and it's very natural having him in the band. It makes sense now, because we're releasing

"I write *a lot* and I try to at least give each idea a chance without being too critical in the first place. Back in the day it was on cassettes, even reel-to-reel, burned onto CDs, and of course nowadays it's MP3 files. So I just went through all my old demos, I'd get inspired by something, and I'd start developing that."

the early albums, and when we go out the setlist will be focused on those first four or five first albums.

"In terms of bass playing, he's more like me — the starting point is more from intuition than looking at the right notes. Jonas is really professional. He can read music, so if you send him a song he'll print out the score and play the bass parts you've written. Mike would listen to the song and think, 'What can I do with this? What parts do I like and what parts could be different?' With our common musical history I can say, 'Remember that Joni Mitchell album where Jaco Pastorius plays this nice little thing?', and he knows instantly. And we can talk about Chris Squire's bass sound on *Awaken*, things like that."

The third bassist here is rising InsideOut signing Jonas Lindberg, who plays on *Revolution*. This was a payment in kind for Stolt's guitar turn on *Miles From Nowhere*, the 25-minute epic title track on Lindberg's latest album. "It's really good," Stolt says. "Before he signed to InsideOut he sent me music and asked me to play some guitar. Many people do this and normally I say no, but I thought, 'Wow, this sounds fantastic! Here's a guy from Sweden, making progressive rock, and the sound is super-professional.' So I said yes, and instead of taking money I said he could play on a Flower Kings album."

By Royal Decree was laid down at Sweden's plush Fenix Studio, using (much to audiophile Stolt's delight) their new, top-of-the-line Neve analogue mixing desk. Whereas *Islands* was recorded remotely, the band were all present this time. Whether it's tweaking a Hammond's draw bars or choosing between different snare drums, the recording process is, Stolt says, much faster and easier in person. "But also being together, having dinners — for the 'band feeling', I think it's crucial to be together."

Stolt is warm, and also astute and shrewd. He can appear a little reserved — especially among the more loquacious American members of Transatlantic — but you don't have a long career like his without nurturing a certain steeliness. Throughout his band's gloriously intricate symphonic prog, there are moments when his philosophical outlook peeps out — in the gorgeous, self-explanatory *Open Your Heart* and *Time The Great Healer* — and listeners get the clearest sense of his interior life.

"My starting point every day is that it's a wonderful world," he offers. "I've been lucky in life, in so many ways, and I am grateful. I was born in Sweden, I have a place to sleep, a nice house, all this equipment. I can make music, travel, I have lots of great musician friends. I understand I'm a lucky person, but I think it also starts with you — it's a mindset. Yes, there are things that are worrying and sad, and people die and there are accidents, and that goes into my lyrics too. Some people say, 'Oh, Roine just writes his hippie lyrics', but if you look at them, it's a balance, like the world itself. Lots of good and bad things happening, all at once."

He seems more spiritual than religious, but perhaps this mindset puts him on a similar plane to his friend and Transatlantic bandmate, Neal Morse? Stolt thinks for a while. "Well, Neal's a committed Christian and comes more from that perspective. Mine is… well, it's not that far away, to be honest."

With The Flower Kings and Transatlantic both set to tour this year, Stolt's positive, pragmatic approach is holding him in good stead in our uncertain times. "I don't want to sound like I don't care, because I do, but I learned that you cannot control the situation, really. We have our gigs booked, we have the Cruise, and I hope it will happen. But I always keep the door open — what if this [pandemic] goes on longer? So you learn to live with it. I try to just shift the focus — what I *can* always do is write music, and do lots of production. I'm remixing and remastering the older albums. I can always go to work, but I cannot control the world. We just have to wait and see. For now, I'm gonna bake my tapes…"

The new album, *By Royal Decree*.

By Royal Decree is out on March 4 via InsideOut. See www.roinestolt.com for more information.

New Adventures In The North

Progressive metal masters **Amorphis** have trimmed the symphonic fat on their new, 14th album, *Halo*, and revealed something… almost poppy, but only how *they* can do pop. Rhythm guitarist Tomi Koivusaari talks to *Prog* about their streamlined anthems, sourcing inspiration from Finnish myths and how they built their unique death metal and folk music-flecked soundscape.

Words: Matt Mills
Images: Sam Jamsen

Many great bands have a magnum opus: that album that catapulted them to superstardom and, years later, remains a creative apex. Metallica have *Master Of Puppets*. Nirvana have *Nevermind*. Rush have *2112*.

Amorphis are undoubtedly another great band. They've experimented with almost every heavy subgenre under the sun and reaped acclaim time and time again for 30 years. That said, what's their magnum opus? Is it 1994's *Tales From The Thousand Lakes*, which revolutionised extreme metal by integrating Middle Eastern guitar harmonies? How about *Skyforger* from 2009: a collection of wonky power/prog metal tracks driven by majestic melodies? Or maybe it's their last album, 2018's *Queen Of Time*, which danced between death metal, hard rock and synth-prog so fluidly that it lifted their popularity to new levels?

It's an inconclusive debate thus far, but any arguments scribbled together will be fed through a paper shredder once readers have heard listened to *Halo*. Amorphis' 14th long-player is just as eclectic as its predecessor, but has been streamlined into 11 direct, episodic anthems. Every song is a short, heavy, catchy thrill, de-emphasising the electronic and symphonic flair from before without compromising the band's long-running prog inclinations.

"On *Queen Of Time*, there were a lot more orchestral elements," concurs Amorphis' rhythm guitarist, Tomi Koivusaari, over

the phone from Finland, his homeland. "We were a little bit afraid of heading further into that orchestral direction, so this sounds more like a band [and not] too many things. There's a lot going on, but it's more hidden."

Lead single *The Moon* is a prime example of *Halo*'s sly complexity. On first listen, it's an instant death metal/power pop hit. Frontman Tomi Joutsen, arguably the best vocalist in all of heavy music, wows as he rockets from Earth-shaking growls to an inescapable earworm of a chorus. *'You're the moon, my guiding light!'* he cries during the track's triumphant crescendo, building a call-and-answer conclusion with his own animalistic roars. Hummable keyboards similarly hook, luring you into repeat listens where you're eventually struck by the complex drum patterns and exotic guitar melodies.

The formula repeats on *A New Land*, which darts from death metal tremolo picking to clean-sung hard rock in the same verse. Then, a huge refrain caves into twanging Scandinavian folk music. Flutes quietly whistle underneath *Windmane*, while *The Wolf*'s guitars impressively run the complete metal gamut, with barrelling chords, squealing high notes and flamboyant Iron Maiden shreds. Epilogue *My Name Is Night* ends *Halo* with a multifaceted duet, featuring Swedish singer Petronella Nettermalm: a melancholic finale to what's otherwise been a hugely accessible progressive metal jolt.

"We were talking in the band, [saying], 'This album is heavier; maybe it's too heavy, with too much growling,'" remembers Koivusaari. "Our producer, Jens Bogren, was the opposite. He was worried that it was too poppy. Of course, there are a lot of catchy melodies with the vocals, but I still think it has heavier riffs and is, overall, heavier."

Amorphis: men of myth-tery.

For the lyrics of the album, Amorphis once again turned to Finnish poet Pekka Kainulainen, who's written every word in every song they've released since 2007. And, as the band have done since as far back as *Tales From The Thousand Lakes*, the foundation of *Halo* has been sourced from the *Kalevala*, the national epic myth of Finland. Specifically, it's a concept album about explorers venturing northwards, paralleling moments from the tale. In the *Kalevala*, Tuonela, the Finnish realm of the dead, is at the northernmost point of the world. Plus, two of the main characters, Väinämöinen and Lemminkäinen, each brave journeys north in search of a woman to marry. "The way Pekka works, he takes some things from

"Somebody's probably reading the *Kalevala* right now because of our music."

the *Kalevala*, but he does it in a personal way," explains Koivusaari.

"When we were kids, you had to learn about [the *Kalevala*] in school," he continues, before drily quipping that, "Everybody hated it. I don't know how many people read it, but everybody knows the characters."

According to the guitarist, the only reason the band began making use of the *Kalevala* in their music was because "none of us were interested in, or capable of, making lyrics". So, they stuck with already established stories. "We felt that we didn't want to ruin the music, which has always been the main thing to us. We always compose new songs as instrumentals first."

He adds: "Somebody's probably reading the *Kalevala* right now because of our music." *Prog* asks if he's ever autographed a book copy of the myth for a fan. "Hundreds," he laughs.

Reminiscing further, Koivusaari paints the picture of a childhood self that, probably, would have keenly avoided the Amorphis we hear in 2022. At the same time that he was being bored to death by the *Kalevala* at school, he was obsessed with the unadulterated death metal fury of aggressors such as Carcass: bands that don't share any of the melodic beauty that Koivusaari and his bandmates' music shimmers with today. As he got older, though, he discovered 70s psych and prog rock, citing the Doors and Pink Floyd as initial favourites.

"When we were 15, it was only Morbid Angel, Carcass and Napalm Death," he explains. "By the time we did our debut album, *The Karelian Isthmus* [in 1992], we were past this 'only death metal' phase. *The Karelian Isthmus* was us thinking, 'We are a death metal band and we have to do death metal', but we'd started having different tastes as well."

> "Kingston Wall only did three albums but they had a huge influence on us. It was progressive rock with Middle Eastern melodies."

The Karelian Isthmus built Amorphis a bulletproof metal foundation, but its hulking chords, marching drums and exclusively grunted vocals showed little in the way of transcendence. The same can't be said of the subsequent *Tales From The Thousand Lakes*. Not only did it establish the band's long-running fascination with the *Kalevala*, but its Middle Eastern-sounding guitar melodies were inspired by obscure, psychedelic and progressive Finns Kingston Wall.

"They only did three albums but they had a huge influence on us," says Koivusaari. "It was progressive rock with Middle Eastern melodies and a couple of songs had Sakari Kukko playing saxophone. At the time, we started to listen to a lot of different types of folk music as well, lots of different music from different countries. That really helped."

The band grew closer and closer to prog rock as the 90s continued, eventually ditching metal altogether during the trilogy of *Tuonela*, *Am Universum* and *Far From The Sun*. "We didn't know what kind of music we were doing anymore," Koivusaari admits. "We were a bit confused; we got rid of the death growls and stuff like that."

Their saving grace was Tomi Joutsen joining the band as their new vocalist, replacing Pasi Koskinen, in 2005. "When Tomi joined the band, he said he could do the growls again and wanted to play all the old songs. We tried that and everybody went, 'Yeah, this feels great!' So, [the metal] came back because of that."

Since partially returning to their roots with growls and extreme music's muscularity, Amorphis have cemented themselves as one of the most dynamic and peerless forces in progressive metal. *Queen Of Time* finally pushed the sextet to academy-level shows, supporting Dimmu Borgir across Europe. A 2021 run under Nightwish added a booster to their rocketing success, despite the cancellation of the tour's UK date. As rock'n'roll as it would be for Amorphis to say they want to conquer the world with their forward-thinking eclecticism, Koivusaari concludes that his band are elated just the way they are.

"Honestly, we don't have any dreams of being a stadium band," he states. "We're very happy where we are and we've been doing this for so long now that we just want to continue for as long as we can."

Considering Amorphis are now responsible for a string of prog metal masterpieces, them wanting to remain on their current course is welcome news to us.

Halo is out on February 11 via Atomic Fire. Head to www.facebook.com/amorphis for more information.

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Motivational Growth

Influenced by the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal as well as classic prog, US pioneers **Watchtower** were an instant sensation to a new progressive generation. But they were too ahead musically and too behind in industry knowledge, as founder/drummer Rick Colaluca, guitarist Ron Jarzombek and vocalist Alan Tecchio explain.

Words: Dave Everley
Image: Frank White

Watch out New York City, 1989! L-R: Ron Jarzombek, Alan Tecchio, Doug Keyser. Back: Rick Colaluca on drums.

Every time Ron Jarzombek saw Watchtower live, his jaw hit the floor. It was the mid-80s and the guitarist's band, San Antonio speed-metallers SA Slayer, regularly shared bills with their compadres from 80 miles up the road in Austin, Texas. Both outfits traded in the same kind of high-velocity, razor-edged noise, but next to Jarzombek's own crew, Watchtower were way out there on their own.

"I was blown away by them," says Jarzombek, who ended up joining Watchtower in 1986, a year after they released their cult classic debut album *Energetic Disassembly*. "It was kind of proggy, which was just unheard of back then. My band did some basic technical metal things, but nothing like they were doing. The technicality of it was like a combination of Rush and Metallica. There wasn't anything else like them around at that time."

Watchtower truly were an anomaly within the melee that was the 80s metal scene: a bunch of longhairs in white hi-tops and cut-off T-shirts who fused the technical ambition of prog's great visionaries with the exhilaration of post-Metallica thrash.

That debut album, *Energetic Assembly*, is one of the foundation stones on which modern progressive metal is built. Their second (and possibly final) album, 1989's *Control And Resistance*, stands as a genre masterpiece. Yet the band themselves remain a marginal concern in the grand scheme of things, cited as a huge influence by those in the know but granted barely a sliver of the recognition afforded to contemporaries such as Voivod and Dream Theater.

"It was always hard to imagine us having a large commercial following," says co-founder and Watchtower drummer Rick Colaluca. "We always saw ourselves as a cult band."

Except part of the blame for Watchtower's perpetual cult-hood can be laid at the feet of Watchtower themselves. For all their game-changing technicality and visionary fusion of styles, they lacked the hunger and gimlet-eyed ambition to achieve any notable success. The fact that they've spent 30 years, on and off, trying and failing to finish a third album speaks volumes about their unfulfilled potential.

A new reissue of *Control And Resistance* may go a little way to rectifying that situation. More than three decades after its release, it still sounds like little else before or since. An exhilarating, sometimes disorientating, blur of noise and aptitude that plays like a blackboard full of baffling maths equations set to music, it stands as alone now as it did when it was originally released in 1989. "Watchtower, to me, is the biggest band from that scene that never made it," says former Dream Theater drummer Mike Portnoy. "They were streets ahead of so many other bands."

The Watchtower story began seven years earlier, in Austin — an oasis of outlaw bohemia amid the 10-gallon hats and would-be JR Ewings of 1980s Texas. The band's first proper line-up — Rick Colaluca, bassist Doug Keyser, guitar shredder Billy White and banshee-voiced frontman Jason McMaster — were metal kids who knew their progressive rock.

"We were a heavy band first and foremost," says Colaluca, who calls his band 'Tower. "We never started out to be a progressive band. But we listened to Rush and Yes and UK, and I loved [Frank Zappa drummer] Terry Bozzio. All those elements started creeping in."

Watchtower began making a name for themselves in their hometown and like-minded outposts such as San Antonio. Shows were sweaty, crazy and a little goofy — they'd throw in curveball covers of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* or the theme to *Frogger*. The influence of Rush and the rest was initially buried under the high-speed mania, but the shredding gradually became wilder and the time changes bolder. They eventually created their own musical alphabet, where certain notes equated to certain letters so they could spell out words or phrases on the fretboard.

“Watchtower is the biggest band from that scene that never made it. They were streets ahead.”

Mike Portnoy

By 1985, and their debut album, Watchtower were pulling regulation-issue thrash metal in strange directions. Proto-prog metal classics *Tyrants In Distress* and *Cimmerian Shadows* matched frantic energy with increasing technicality and paint-peeling vocals. *Energetic Disassembly* was a hit with the underground metal cognoscenti, but it barely registered with a prog scene that was a long way away from being primed for something so intense.

“There were people who just didn’t get it,” says Colaluca. “But we’d run around like crazy onstage, making stupid faces, putting so much energy into it, so even if you didn’t like the music there was something worth sticking around for.”

Foreshadowing what was to come, Watchtower took the impetus they’d built with *Energetic Disassembly* and let it fizzle out. It would be a full four years before they properly followed up their debut — no great shakes now, but an aeon in the pre-internet 1980s.

Debut *Energetic Disassembly* (1985).

***Control And Resistance* (1989) – now updated and reissued through Cherry Red.**

Partly this was down to key personnel changes. Guitarist Billy White was the first to go, quitting the band in 1986 as his interest in fast, furious music waned (he would end up backing hard rock warhorse Don Dokken a couple of years later). The obvious person to call in as his replacement was their old friend Ron Jarzombek from SA Slayer.

“When Jason McMaster called me to come down and audition, I didn’t want to do it,” says Jarzombek, adding that the band’s music was already changing at a molecular level, getting more progressive and technical as well as heavier. “I didn’t want to take Billy’s spot, ’cos it was a little bit too much. I was hoping it would be a guitar duo — both of us in the band. But Jason said, ‘No, Billy’s out.’”

Within a couple of years McMaster had gone too, opting to devote his energies to his cock rock side-project Dangerous Toys after a major label deal was dangled under their nose. The timing wasn’t great — Watchtower were on the verge of signing a deal with German metal label Noise. They parachuted in a local singer, Mike Soliz, but things didn’t click.

It was McMaster who recruited his own replacement. Alan Tecchio sang with New Jersey metallers Hades at the time. He knew Watchtower through the tape-trading network, a kind of proto-internet for aficionados of the underground scene, and he and McMaster were pen-pal buddies.

“He called me to say he’d got a deal,” says Tecchio now. “I thought he meant Watchtower had signed. But he went, ‘No, it’s Dangerous Toys. You’re the only guy who can replace me in Watchtower — you’ve got the voice, you like the band, you just need get yourself to Texas.’”

Tecchio did just that, hightailing it to Austin to an audition. He jammed with the three remaining members of Watchtower

in bassist Doug Keyser's house, blasting through Iron Maiden's *Wrathchild* and Living Colour's funk-rock hit *Cult Of Personality*. He got the gig. "He came from a similar background, musically," says Colaluca. "His voice fitted the music really well and he had the right attitude."

He needed it. A month later, Tecchio and his new bandmates were in Berlin, recording *Control And Resistance* in Noise's in-house studio. The singer hadn't even played a show with Watchtower, and now he was singing words written by Keyser — the band's chief lyricist — for another vocalist entirely. If that wasn't stressful enough, they cycled through a series of ill-matched producers who just were not oscillating on their wavelength (the band's exasperated label eventually appointed their own in-house engineer/producer, Tom Stokinger).

But it was worth the stress. *Control And Resistance* landed in November 1989, flooring and baffling those who heard it in equal measure. Its eight tracks took what they'd done up on *Energetic Disassembly* almost half a decade earlier and pumped it up on every level: Escher riffs collided with head-spinning time changes and jazzy bass solos, while Tecchio's eight-mile-high wail barely touched ground.

The prog metal movement that the Texans themselves had sparked into life earlier in the decade was finally starting to assume a recognisable form. Kindred spirits Fates Warning and fellow former thrash kids Voivod were making increasingly complicated noises, while a bunch of Berklee College Of Music nerdlings had changed their name from Majesty to Dream Theater and released their own debut album, *When Dream And Day Unite*. Germany even threw up its own Watchtower soundalikes in Sieges Even.

"I remember the first things I heard from them, I was, like, 'Damn, that sounds familiar,'" says Rick Colaluca of the latter. "But, hell, we were ripping licks off from bands like UK, so it didn't matter."

It's a stretch to say Watchtower were on the verge of conquering the world — they were too far ahead of everything else going for anything remotely close to mass appeal. But those who were clued in recognised how groundbreaking they were.

"We kept getting feedback from people, saying they'd never heard anything like us," says Colaluca. "And the fact that we were always searching for new music ourselves and not really finding anything that was like us gave us an idea that wasn't the same as most of the things out there."

Watchtower's musical ambition was inversely proportional to their professional drive. While a tour supporting Swiss prog-thrashers Coroner in Europe gave them a foothold on that side of the Atlantic, they fumbled the ball by failing to hit the road back home. A video for the song *The Eldritch* got zero MTV airplay, and the needle barely moved on sales for *Control And Resistance*.

"It didn't do as well as we were hoping," says Colaluca. "But it put us in a position where we felt we could take to the next level. And that's when the whole thing fell apart."

Just how Watchtower came undone is a mix of bad luck, poor communication and all-round apathy. Soon after they finished the sparse touring for *Control And Resistance*, they began work on what would become their third album, *Mathematics*.

Things were looking promising. The songs they were writing sounded great, but then Ron Jarzombek began suffering major problems with his hands that put him out of action for two years. It was too much for Alan Tecchio, who found himself running out of money. He quit the band and returned north to hook up with members of his old outfit, Hades.

Even after surgery rectified Jarzombek's problem, the remaining members of Watchtower found themselves tangled in indecision. "We would get lost with musical direction: 'Where is this song going? It isn't good enough,'" says the guitarist. "It was a big struggle to figure out where we were going."

Watchtower never officially ended, they just drifted into nothingness. There were sporadic attempts to resurrect the band though. Jason McMaster rejoined for a reunion show in 1999, and they even tried to record the *Mathematics* songs with him. But nothing came of any of it, and Watchtower dissipated again.

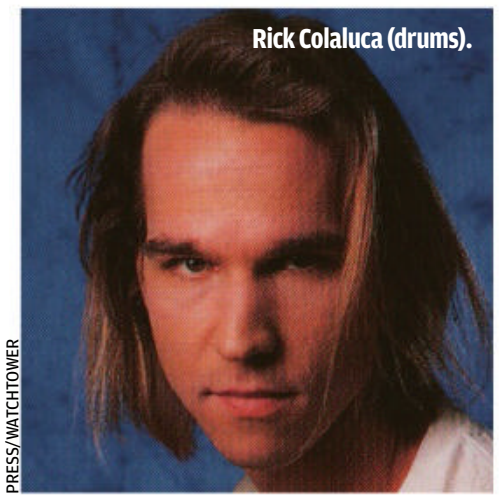
Yet it wasn't quite over. A reunion with Alan Tecchio in the late 2000s saw them resurrecting the *Mathematics* songs. A new single, *The Size Of Matter*, was released in 2010. It was followed half a decade later by the *Concepts Of Math: Book One* EP, featuring five tracks from the *Mathematics* album, with the promise of a follow-up, *Concepts Of Math: Book Two*, collecting the remainder.

That EP has never materialised. Somewhere along the way, Alan Tecchio was fired before the outstanding tracks were completed. "I got an email from Ron with one word in the subject line: 'Adios'," he says. "I was, like, 'You fuckers! I'm the only one who can put up with your craziness!' Those guys are so talented, it amazes me they're not super-rich and famous from their abilities. They're kind of their own worst enemies."

Today, those remaining songs lie in pieces, much like Watchtower itself. The last time they were physically together was in 2010, when they played a rare live set at a German festival. There's an awareness on the part of the members that a reunion is possible — "I wouldn't call it totally off," says Rick Colaluca vaguely — but the necessary drive to actually make it happen isn't really there.

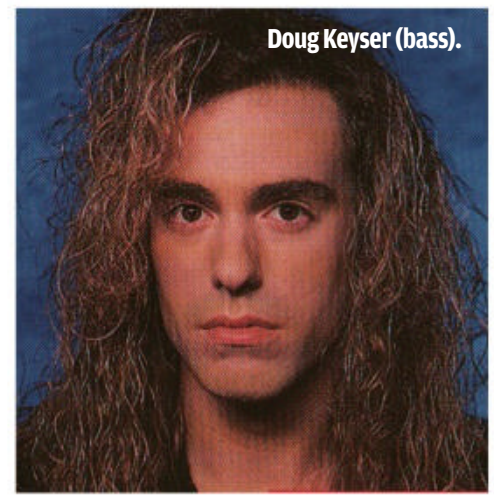
"There's things we could have done differently, for sure," says Colaluca. "If we'd been highly motivated, we could have gotten past the problems we had, but none of us were super hard-charging people. But what we did with the band speaks for itself. We definitely had some influence on the evolution of the progressive and technical metal scene. We left a mark. If none of us ever do anything again musically, we've always got that."

Control And Resistance is out now via Cherry Red. See www.facebook.com/OfficialWatchTower.


Rick Colaluca (drums).

Ron Jarzombek (guitars).

Alan Tecchio (vocals).


Doug Keyser (bass).

PRESS/WATCHTOWER

"We never started out to be a progressive band. We listened to Rush, Yes and UK. All those elements started creeping in."

Rick Colaluca

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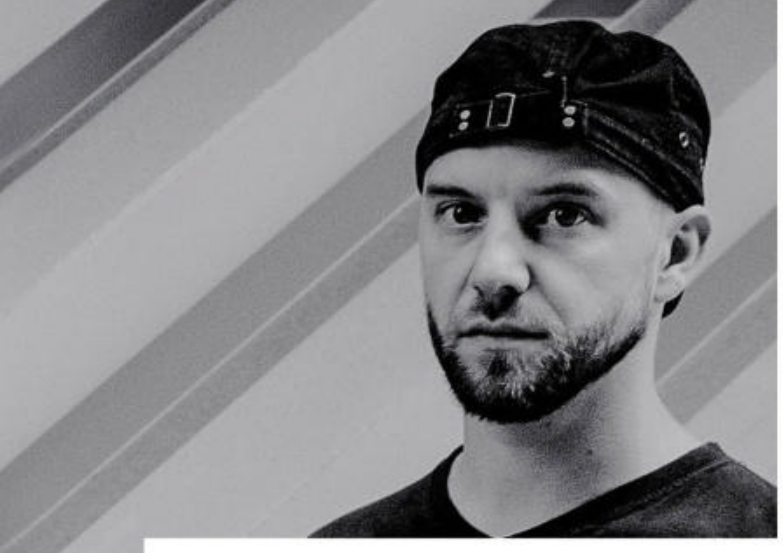
Wonky SANCTUARY

French-Irish quartet **Molybaron** find no time for boredom with their second album, *The Mutiny*, which bagged them a label deal with InsideOut. Frontman Gary Kelly tells *Prog* how a move to Paris helped change his life and why he's thinking big on the band's third release.

Words: Dom Lawson
Images: Alex Pixelle



Boredom can be a powerful motivator. When Molybaron frontman and creative driving force Gary Kelly moved from his native Ireland to Paris just over a decade ago, he had no plans to make music. But when he found himself regularly at a loose end, with little to occupy his time beyond his job as a graphic designer, the logical choice was to return to his teenage hobby.

"I'd stopped playing guitar when I was about 19. I played from 13 to 19 and I just *stopped*. I still had my guitar there, but I didn't touch it for years. So when I arrived in Paris, I decided to pick it back up. I answered an ad in some mag for a death metal band. They were looking for a guitarist, I joined that band, and you know what? It rekindled my love for the guitar; I remembered why I'd loved it in the first place. I was playing other people's music and I was kind of getting bored doing that. In the meantime I was working on the first Molybaron album, just writing it in the background."

Although he admits that it took a long time to find the right musicians to bring his undeniably peculiar musical vision to life, Molybaron — with members Steven Andre (guitar), Sébastien de Saint-Angel (bass) and Camille Greneron (drums) — sounded more or less the finished article on their self-titled debut. Their music recalling countless things without ever directly referencing a single one, Kelly's oddball take on progressive metal was surely destined to have an impact. Or, not.

"We released the album in 2017, and I thought everyone was going to love it, everyone would hear it and we were going to be stars!" Kelly laughs. "Unfortunately, I had no idea how to release an album, so I just distributed it to Spotify. I had no strategy. I just posted a few things to Facebook, like, 'Hey, listen to this great album!' but *nobody* heard it. So we went to a PR company and then we started to get a bit more attention."

"The great thing about InsideOut is you're not just a number to them. They're really responsive and help out all the time."

Buoyed by a positive online reaction to their first record, Molybaron switched their focus to playing live. Original drummer Raphael Bouglon gave way to Camille Greneron in 2019, at which point Kelly notes that the chemistry between the four-piece really began to build, while noting that the band's early gigs were often genuinely disastrous.

"Oh, we were fucking *awful* at the start," he grins. "I hadn't a clue how to interact with the audience. As I was playing guitar, I kept moving my head to look at the guitar and I wasn't even singing into the mic. It was a disaster! But I started to figure it out. A lot of the songs on the second album started to get tested while we were playing live."

The critical turning point for Molybaron arrived, somewhat ironically, midway through a desolate 2020. Recorded on their own dime and in their own time, the band's second album, *The Mutiny*, took everything that was great about its predecessor and cranked it up several notches. In particular, Kelly's vocals were in a different league to his previous efforts and perfectly matched the band's eccentric songwriting.

"Most of the reviews of the first album were pretty positive," says Kelly. "I had zero confidence in my voice, if I'm honest. But a lot of the reviews were saying, 'His voice really stands out!' and I thought, 'Oh, you mean in a *bad* way?' [laughs] But I figured that these people are all strangers with no vested interest in making me happy, so maybe my voice *is* alright. So on the second album I just thought, 'Fuck it, I'm going to experiment a bit.' *Animals* has this weird *'La, la, la, la'* chant in it, and you may wonder why it's there, you know? But I was in the studio and I just thought, 'Fuck it!' and put it in. I guess that's confidence!"

Full of enthusiasm for their new material, Kelly and his cohorts punted *The Mutiny* around to as many record labels as they could. Unfortunately, a global pandemic was in the process of ruining everything, and as Kelly notes with a wry smile, "Nobody was interested in signing anybody."

Things worked out in the end. *The Mutiny* was released in May 2020, off the back of a successful crowdfunding campaign, which enabled the band to record videos for *Animals* and *Lucifer*. *The Mutiny* quickly garnered a heap of glowing reviews from multiple publications and media, including a rare Album Of The Month accolade from German metal mag *Rock Hard*. As a result of that vote of confidence, former Gojira manager Richard Gamba got in touch with Kelly, and inquired why exactly Molybaron weren't already signed.

"I told him that we'd been turned down by just about everybody, but two weeks later, he got us signed to InsideOut, through Thomas Waber. The great thing about InsideOut is that they're not a big team. You don't feel like you're just a number to them. They're really responsive, and they help out all the time. It's kind of a boutique label and I really like that."

Newly re-released and given the push it deserves, *The Mutiny* provides a sublime entry point into the band's perverse but wildly accessible musical world. Having been denied the opportunity to tour the album first time around, Kelly avows that playing live will be his band's primary focus for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, ideas are brewing for album number three. These days, he's far too busy playing weird riffs to be bored.

"I'm going to probably put more synths into this one, maybe a bit more electronica," he enthuses. "I've always wanted to just stop the whole track and then put a separate piece in the centre that would just be strings and voice, a string quartet. Does that sound proggy? Maybe the whole album is just going to sound like Genesis, I don't know! [Laughs] I'm just going to do what I did before and play what I want to play. That's the best recipe for me."

The Mutiny is out now via InsideOut. See www.molybaron.com for more information.

THE PROG INTERVIEW

MADDY PRIOR

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's Maddy Prior MBE. The British folk singer co-founded Steeleye Span in 1969 and rose to fame as the band's talented lead vocalist. She's now regarded as one of folk's leading lights and has enjoyed a varied solo career, guesting with both Mike Oldfield and Ian Anderson, among others. Now in her seventh decade, the singer and songwriter continues to perform with The Carnival Band and was part of Steeleye Span's 50th anniversary celebrations. Here, she revisits her early life and looks ahead to Steeleye's future.

Words: Jo Kendall

"I tend to plough my own furrow. I'm focused on what I'm doing and not comparing it with what other people are doing," says Maddy Prior as *Prog* rounds up an afternoon's talk about her early life and Steeleye Span reaching 50-plus years. And maybe because of that outlook, Prior is probably one of the most recognisable voices in folk, and folk rock music — and her face is pretty recognisable too, after a string of hits in the early 70s with Steeleye Span led them to be staples of shows such as *Top Of The Pops*.

From an early age Prior loved to sing, and was encouraged to do so and take part in competitions. In the late 50s the family relocated from Blackpool due to her father's job — drama writer and novelist Allan Prior co-created hit TV show *Z-Cars* and later *Howard's Way* — and Prior found herself in the Roman town of St Albans, which had a thriving music scene and was a folk epicentre.

Meeting like-minds such as Donovan and Mac MacLeod in the local folk clubs, in 1965 she teamed up with guitarist/vocalist Tim Hart both professionally and romantically and formed a duo that went on to release two albums on TeePee Records, *Folk Songs Of Old England*, volumes 1 and 2. By 1969 Prior and Hart wanted a change, and it came in the form of former Fairport Convention founder and bassist Ashley Hutchings. Together they created an electric folk band, Steeleye Span, whose popularity remains today, largely because of their enormous, resonant 1975 hit *All Around My Hat*. While in Steeleye Span, Prior would meet her future husband, bassist Rick Kemp, who replaced the departing Hutchings in 1972 (he was off to form The Albion Band).

Prior has released solo albums, joined June Tabor as the duo Silly Sisters, played with The Carnival Band and guested with Jethro Tull, Mike Oldfield and Status Quo. In 2001, she was awarded an MBE for services to folk music. And passing on the torch, Prior runs Stones Barn arts centre in Cumbria, where she holds weekend singing classes and residential workshops in folk music, often with her daughter, singer-songwriter Rose Kemp.

Today, in Ye Old Fighting Cocks pub in St Albans, Prior has been filming a feature about Steeleye Span, and pondering their 50-plus years. A May tour is planned for 2022, but in the meantime, a document to the band's life to date exists in the release *Est'd 1969*, featuring the current line-up of Prior, Liam Genockey (drums), Julian Littman (guitar, mandolin, keyboards, vocals), Jessica May Smart (violin, vocals), Andrew 'Spud' Sinclair (guitar, vocals), Benji Kirkpatrick (bouzouki, guitar, mandolin, banjo, vocals) and Roger Carey (bass, vocals). "I've been very grateful to have been a working musician for years," Prior reflects, now aged 74. "I had a week working in a Wimpy Bar while on holiday at the end of school for which I earned £10, and at the same time I'd done one gig with a band for £8. I thought, 'I'll do this for a living.'"

Steeleye Span's 50th anniversary album, Est'd 1969.

"I've been very grateful to have been a working musician for years."

PRESS: STEELEYE SPAN/P SILVER

> "Jethro Tull put us on tour with them. We did five nights at the LA Forum – 18,000 people a night. I was terrified the whole time."

You were born in Blackpool, but found yourself being uprooted to Hertfordshire at a young age. What was that like?

I was 11 when we moved from Blackpool to St Albans, which has just got to be one of the biggest culture shocks you can come across. The Harpenden grammar school girls couldn't understand me, nor I them [laughs], but I caught on quick and soon talked 'like that' [adopts over-the-top posh accent].

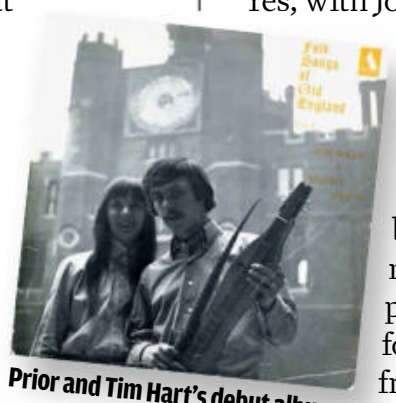
How did music enter your life?

Back in Blackpool, my father had realised that I could sing so he took me to someone on his paper, the *Blackpool Gazette* — he was a reporter before he became a drama writer — who did music reviews. They said, "Oh, we've got a little songbird here": so they sent me off to join the Co-op choir, which was run by Miss Whiteside, where I learned a lot of songs. You didn't learn technique at that age, just a bit of repertoire, and you'd enter these competitions, at which I was absolutely useless [laughs].

PRESS:STEELEYE SPAN/KM

Maddy Prior: one of the most recognisable voices (and faces) in progressive folk.

So you could sing, but what about instrumentation?
I wanted to play the violin and when we came down south we got one — we took it or hired it from the school. But my father said, at the end of a year of me scraping away, "Do we want to play the violin? We're not getting anywhere." It must have been great for him as a writer having that going on. So that got shelved and I started to play the banjo, then guitar. But that's six strings and I never got on with six strings. I was passionate about the banjo but then Tim [Hart] picked it up and played for two months. He was so much better than me so I put it down again — and so did he, which was really annoying! [Laughs.]


Prior and Tim Hart's debut album.

What were you listening to when you started singing folk songs?
I started with American material, people like Woody Guthrie, and Joan Baez. There was a very good record shop in St Albans, Mark Greene's Record Room, and he'd been around for a long time [the shop opened in 1957]. He was good with young people, there were booths to sit in and listen to music and he knew quite a bit about music. It made a huge difference to the St Albans scene. [The Zombies and Donovan shopped there too — Record Shops Ed.]

So these clubs were your social hubs and where musicians met, then?
Yes, we knew Donovan that way, and Mac MacLeod who played with Donovan, then was in the band Hurdy Gurdy — he was Donovan's *Hurdy Gurdy Man*! Donovan lived in Welwyn Garden City but came over here a lot because there was a lot of music. There was The Cock, The Peahen, The Red Lion and The Goat. They were all very old, dark Victorian places, very dusty.

Folk music was in the pop charts then, wasn't it?
Yes, with Joan Baez you have Bob Dylan and others crossing over into the mainstream, it was cool at the time to be interested in folk music — but not particularly English folk music. My friends would come with me to folk clubs. They didn't always like it but it did depend on who was on, and there was a lot of humour in the folk clubs, a lot of comedians because it was like stand-up with music.

From there you get Mike Harding, Jasper Carrott...
And Billy Connolly!

The folk scene was, and still is, quite political.
The folk scene has a left-wing bias. Guthrie was a big voice, and spoke of the issues of the time in my world. If there was an issue I would find a song that was old that reflected it, like *Hard Times Of Old England* — which we're looking at again, unfortunately, it never goes away. We'd look at old songs about new issues such as *Blackleg Miner,* which we sang all the way through the Miners' Strike [in 1984], and when I first sang it was an interesting historical document from about 1844. Now it's an interesting historical document again.

How did you meet Tim Hart and start gathering songs?

With the Roman ruins, the Abbey, the beautiful city and gardens, St Albans must have been quite inspiring?
It was — Blackpool was quite flat and the bright lights were for tourists. We came here and these old, old buildings and trees that were upright, not blown at an angle by north-west winds! It was another world. I loved it. You'd wander around with your friends and sit in the nearby park [Verulamium, a former Roman city and the site of the ruins] and sit and play music. We had a great time, very casual... and a few drugs, but nothing untoward. But I wasn't into that, I've always been a drinker! [Laughs loudly.]

PRESS: STEELEYE SPAN
Clutching those coveted discs circa 1975! L-R: Chris Wright, Maddy Prior, Tim Hart, Bob Johnson, Pete Knight, Nigel Pegrum, Joe Lustig, Rick Kemp.

Maddy Prior enjoys some *Flowers Of The Forest.*

He was part of the gang and so we got to know each other. I was in a duo with Mac MacLeod [Mac & Maddy] but also working as a roadie, driving American musicians around. A duo, Sandy and Jeanie Darlington said to me, "You should stop singing with an American accent, you're shit at it." So they gave me loads of folk tapes to listen to, and initially it was like, "Oh God, all these boring old guys", then eventually I got my ear in, which you do with music. I listened and listened, and eventually you hear the *song* and get past the presentation.

"We were all about being electric, right from the start. Martin Carthy was one of the loudest electric players I know. Some people didn't like it."

What were the first songs in your repertoire?

The first song we got out of [Thomas D'Urfey's 18th century song book] *Pills To Purge Melancholy*, *Long George*, which was rude, of course! Our tunes often had nothing to do with what is written on the page, we sort of made a stab at it and put in words that we liked. We also went to Cecil Sharp House and listened to more or less the whole library. It took us about four weeks. I heard a lot of material and a lot of singers and styles.

The material was working and you were getting popular when you played live. So what happened next?

Tim and I made two albums – and it was really unusual for folk artists here to have an album.

PRESS:STEELEYE SPAN/P SILVER

Tony Pike came along and picked us up for Teepee Records. We made the records in his kitchen, on a Revox, in his house in Putney. That was the first album, *Folk Songs Of Old England*, and for *Volume 2* the budget went up and we had two Revoxes [laughs], so we could overdub. It took us as long to make it as it took to play it. The albums gave us a lot of kudos and exposure.

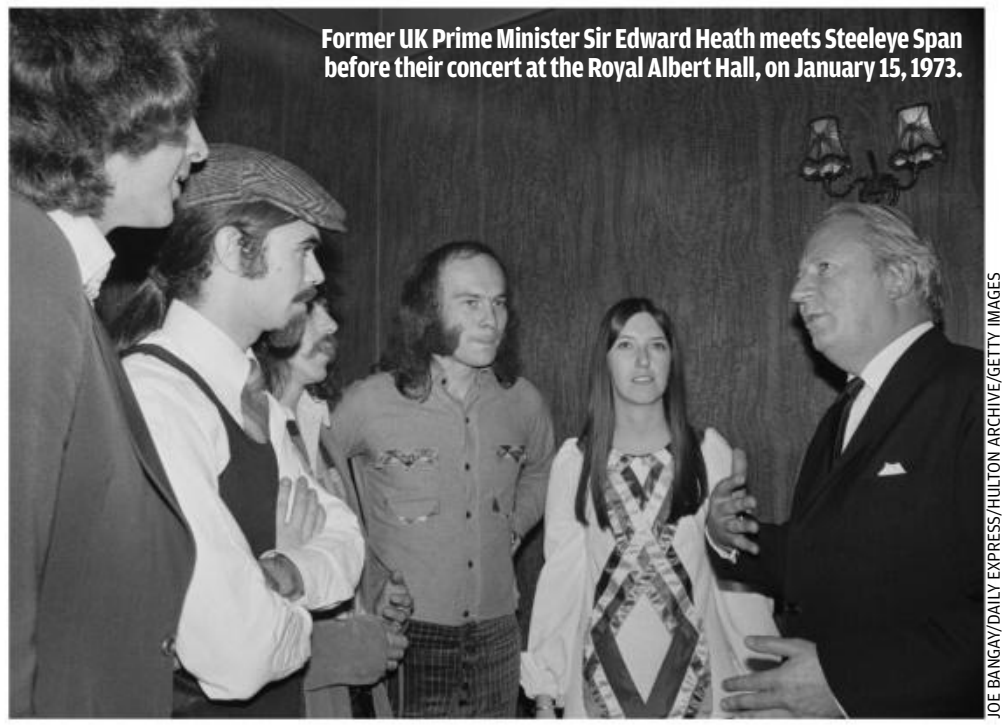
And Ye Old Fighting Cocks' exterior was used on the front cover. Do you remember that day?
I do — it was a very cold day and we had hot buttered rum by the fire. We picked this place because it's 'Old English'. It's supposedly the oldest licensed public house in England.

Outside Ye Old Fighting Cocks for Folk Songs Of Old England Vol 2.

You got to know the influential folklorist and singer Bert Lloyd, didn't you?
We did. He was an inspiration to the whole of the folk revival, along with Ewan [MacColl]. He was the founder and artistic director of [influential folk label] Topic Records for a long time, and the releases have the most amazing covers and names, he was really good with words. He brought an elegance to the revival and a light touch. Although he was a communist he wasn't banging a loud drum. He brought Tim and I songs like *The Gardener*, which Steeleye recorded on *Est'd 1969*.

Tim had said there was a glass ceiling for the progress of folk musicians. Were you ambitious?
You don't go into British folk music with ambition, really, but we were. We'd been playing the clubs as a duo for three or four years. We were limited by the amount of people in the venues, the amount of people in the band — and we wanted to play louder. Everyone had been talking about going electric as Dylan had. There was this conversation about who was gonna do it. None of us had the budget for it. But Ashley [Hutchings] had a record company behind him…

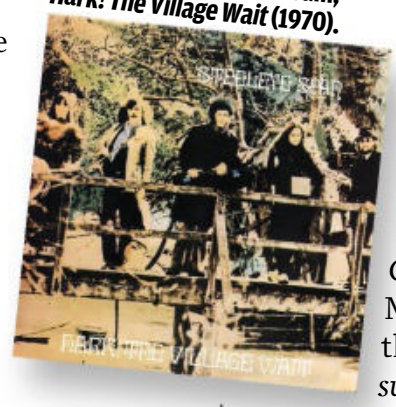
When did you encounter Ashley?
We'd played on festival stages with Fairport Convention, and Tim and I were around north London when they were getting *Liege & Leif* together. One night, when we were living in Whitehall Park, Archway, he came to dinner with [Irish folk duo] Terry & Gay Woods. We were sat around a table and they said, "Do you want to join a band?" We said, "We'll have a try-out tomorrow,'" and that went quite well.


Former UK Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath meets Steeleye Span before their concert at the Royal Albert Hall, on January 15, 1973.

JOE BANGAY/DAILY EXPRESS/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

When did you actually become a group?
Autumn 1969. We rehearsed in a friend's house in Wiltshire and were "getting it together in the country", which was a terrible idea. We spent three months doing it, it was quite strange. Ashley had been in an accident [Fairport's tour van had crashed that May] and wasn't on an even keel. Two couples — Terry and Gay and me and Tim — as referees was not the way to run a band.

Steeleye Span's debut album, Hark! The Village Wait (1970).



How did you arrive at Steeleye Span's name?
During the three months in autumn 1969. We came home a lot and we were in St Albans, at Tim's house, which was the vicarage. [Folk artist and Dave Swarbrick collaborator] Martin Carthy was staying there and looking through some books, late at night with Tim — as usual. Looking at a book of Norfolk songs [and one called *Horkstow Grange* from 1760], Martin says, "Look at this: '*Pity them that suffer, pity poor old Steeleye Span.*' Isn't that a great name?" Tim said, "That's the name of our band."

Martin went on to join Steeleye, didn't he?
Yes, we made the first album [*Hark! The Village Wait*] in March 1970 and then Terry and Gay left and they assumed it would all collapse. That didn't happen. We re-formed with Martin on guitar and keys and Peter Knight on strings and keys. Then we did some gigs — that first line-up never gigged.

Was there any resistance from the folk purists to you plugging in and rocking out?
We were all about being electric, right from the start. Martin Carthy was one of the loudest electric players I know. Some people didn't like it, we might not have been very good at it right at the beginning. We were loud and toppy with our twin reverbs, speakers to tear your head off. Mix my voice with a fiddle… People said they couldn't hear us, the noise was unbelievable.

Steeleye Span in 1971. L-R: Maddy Prior, Peter Knight, Ashley Hutchings, Tim Hart, Martin Carthy.

PHOTO BY ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

You got so popular that you attracted some celebrities. How did you get Peter Sellers on *Commoners Crown*?
We're sitting around and someone said, "What this needs is a ukulele." I have no idea why; at the time the ukulele was completely unknown instrument. We said, "Does anyone know anyone who has a ukulele?" Then Bob [Johnson, guitar] said, "Peter Sellers does." So we got in touch and he said yes. He was so delighted to be asked but also terrified. We sat in with him, at Morgan Studios, and he was brilliant — and also relieved that we were fans.

How did David Bowie get collared for his contribution to *Now We Are Six*?
Rick [Kemp] had been in a band with Mick Ronson in Hull and he asked if they were around while we were recording. He said yes, so Ian Anderson got in touch with him, as he was producing the record. That was a good day in the studio — however when Ian set Bowie off to play this blistering saxophone solo he hadn't pressed the record button, so we had to ask him to do it again!

Steeleye Span: Est'd 1969. Still going strong in 2022!

PRESS:STEELEYE SPAN/P SILVER

You were label-mates with Tull, weren't you?
That's right. We joined in 1972 and were the first band to be signed to Chrysalis who they didn't manage. Tull were on the label and they put us on tour with them. We did five nights in America at the LA Forum — 18,000 people a night. I was terrified the whole time. My mum said, "I don't know why you do it", but I had to. It was exciting.

Commoner's Crown with Peter Sellers on ukelele.

What was the reception like for you in the US?
Really good — we'd start with Ian joining us for *Lyke-Wake Dirge*, where we were all dressed in ribbons, and we had Mummers onstage with us.

Did the Americans understand it?
No, they didn't [laughs]. Jethro Tull were also doing *Monty Python* sketches and had these long idiosyncratic asides. There were no rules, there was no one way to do things then.

Britain joined the European Economic Community in '73 and an 11-day festival celebrated the fact. You played a night, the Fanfare For Europe Gala. What do you remember about that?
It was at the Albert Hall and [then-Prime Minister] Edward Heath was there and we shook hands. It was a good gig, but in society there was a hoo-ha about 'Were we going to become unBritish?' and ideas like that. And now the opposite has happened [with Brexit].

You've had a varied career outside of Steeleye; you collaborated with June Tabor, sung with Jethro Tull, Mike Oldfield and Status Quo... is there anyone you'd like to work with in future?
I'll collaborate with anyone [laughs]! It's always more scary than working with Steeleye, though. I did something with Nancy Kerr and James Fagan at Cambridge Folk Festival, and sang with Richard Thompson at his 70th, but I tread that line between being terrified and being thrilled by it. Long may that continue.

It's more than 50 years since Steeleye formed. How does that feel?
When we started we didn't even know we were going to *live* for 50 years, never mind being in a band for that time. I never planned anything. I always considered that we staggered from song to song, but Bob had a way of planning things conceptually. Our early years went very fast — our contract was 10 albums in five years. We rehearsed at the Irish Club in Eton Square, then a place called The Black Hole, which describes it perfectly. We became somewhat cavalier with the recording process — there are some things on albums that we regret. We'd run out of ideas. We'd have four or five good songs then we'd have to pull something together like *The Drunkard*. It would have been better if we had concertina'd a few together.

> "I think about Steeleye as a family firm these days. It's got that quality."

"Can you play it again, Mr Bowie?" 1974's Now We Are Six.

With *Est'd 1969* you were reunited with Ian Anderson and it's the first time he'd played on a Steeleye album.
And he did a beautiful job, and for free [laughs]. This goes back to *Now We Are Six* and that David Bowie didn't ask for a fee. Ian told me about a time he met David again, playing a TV show. He knocked on David's dressing-room door and said, "Hello, we did that Steeleye Span thing. The one thing I took away from that is that you didn't charge for that cameo performance. I've taken that to heart, I don't ask for money for cameo performances." And Bowie shot him a look and said, "Didn't I get paid?!" And then he smiled, he was just winding him up...

What's the position of Steeleye as a band today?
I think about Steeleye as a family firm these days. It's got that quality. Benji's the son of our friend and former member Jon Kirkpatrick, and he's worked with Bellowhead so he knows the genre well. Liam [Genockey]'s been in the band for 30 years, and Julian [Litmann]'s been in it a good while but we had to find a way of bringing the others in. As a seven-piece, it's really rocking. We want to maintain the tune, but we try and fill the room with noise. I do like it loud.

Steeleye Span hit the road in May 2022. See www.steeleyespan.org.uk.

Edited by Dave Everley
prog.reviews@futurenet.com

New spins...

MARILLION

The clock is running down on us all, and Steve Hogarth and co are counting the seconds on their lushly pre-apocalyptic new album.

Words: Johnny Sharp **Illustration:** Pete Fowler

Before the release of Marillion's last album, *FEAR. (Fuck Everyone And Run)*, Steve Hogarth expressed despair at self-serving attitudes on the rise, even before Brexit and Trump loomed into view: "I have a feeling that we're approaching some kind of sea change in the world — an irreversible political, financial, humanitarian and environmental storm. I hope that I'm wrong."

Obviously no one really foresaw the events of the past two years, but the response to it among individuals as well as governments has arguably confirmed Marillion's world view. Nearly six years later, it's fair to say things aren't looking any rosier. And Hogarth's unease has evolved into something faintly pre-apocalyptic, if *FEAR*'s follow-up is anything to go by.

An Hour Before It's Dark takes its title and central theme from the feeling that there's a clock ticking ever louder as people squabble over the fundamental right not to get a needle pricked in their arms or reduce their carbon footprint. And from the very start of the album, Marillion sound determined to grab the listener by the lapels.

Be Hard On Yourself is based around an intriguing central lyrical idea, which seems to contradict the prevailing wisdom that we need to #bekind to ourselves in these trying times. Hogarth might agree up to a point, but ultimately he's appealing to us to make sacrifices for the sake of our fellow humans because *'You've been spoiled for year'* and, as he warns towards the climax, *'We haven't got long... til the end of this song.'*

Messrs Rothery, Kelly, Trewavas and Mosley drive home the point, with an earworm of an anthemic chorus, before the tempo picks up in the final minutes and the urgency spirals as if to confirm his words, a mad dash before the listener bursts suddenly out into the open air and the band falls away, as Hogarth breathessly gasps, *'We've got an hour before it's dark.'*

An Hour Before It's Dark

EARMUSIC

> **It's an album full of anxiety and uncertainty.**

But the sentiments aren't just about altruism — Hogarth is admitting that self-interest and fear of our own futures are tied up in it too, as *Reprogram The Gene* confirms. *'I don't want to be food for the trees,'* he roars defiantly, referring to *'Greta T'* alongside a situation, which *'begins with the letter C'* where *'the cure's coming at us, the cure is the disease'*. Is he saying the pandemic might just prove a wake-up call to address other, more long-term global issues? That's in the ear of the beholder.

A further irony that will probably stick more firmly in most fans' heads comes in the epic chorus of *Murder Machines*, where Hogarth sings *'I put my arms around her, and I killed her with love',* which seems as good a summary as any of the heartbreaking feeling of passing on a deadly virus that many might have felt over the past two years.

If that's the emotional peak of the record, the album's second half initially seems like a bit of a comedown in comparison, as *The Crown And The Nightingale* and *Sierra Leone* don't grab the attention quite so readily. The arena rock swell begins to plateau and drift, while the lyrics are more wreathed in symbolism, as in the latter song's tale of finding a diamond in a rubbish heap and resolving not to sell it.

There's a more incisive edge to the 15-minute closing track, as *Care* sets fears of our own mortality against the overarching theme of a planet facing a race to avert disaster. *'Who knows how much time they've got left?'* Hogarth asks, and his point is reinforced more dynamically as swampy funk-infused basslines add to the sense of mild panic. That in turn only enhances the impact when a full-fat Rothery guitar line, borne on the wings of a mighty orchestral rock storm, swoops out of nowhere, before it plunges back into murky self-doubt. These are breathtaking moments, benefitting from sonic contrasts that weren't quite so arresting in the preceding tracks.

Hogarth references previous lyrics on the album, including the title, as if elements of our journey are flashing before us as we prepare for the final curtain. But this time, either side of recalling once more how *'she wrapped her arms around me'* a celestial choir envelopes us and our hero seems to be revitalised with an important earthly realisation: *'The angels of this world are not in the walls of churches... The heroes in this world, working while we're all sleeping.'* The ones who've been a little harder on themselves, perhaps?

And finally, a relatively happy ending is delivered. *'An angel here on Earth came down here to carry me home,'* sings Hogarth at the track's close. It's a soothing, redemptive ending to an album full of anxiety and uncertainty. But within it all is a stirring and timely message. And there's plenty of powerful sounds herein to keep us listening to it, for however much time we've got left.

18+

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AVAXHOME-

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ROSALIE CUNNINGHAM

Two Piece Puzzle CHERRY RED

A masterclass in form and style from prog's psych queen.

To borrow a phrase from ancient Rome, via the Royal Air Force motto, the second solo album from former Purson frontwoman Rosalie Cunningham proves the truth behind the expression 'per ardua ad astra': through hardships to the stars. Unable to work with her band during the pandemic, during which the artist contracted Covid, Cunningham created her new record working in isolation with her partner Rosco Levee, hence the *Two Piece Puzzle* of the title. Yet despite the restrictions imposed by the lockdown, Cunningham sounds inspired throughout.

> **Despite restrictions, Cunningham sounds inspired throughout.**

The psychedelic flavours of Purson and Cunningham's 2019 solo debut still permeate the new music, but in terms of the compositions and sounds found on the album, The Beatles and Queen seem to be key points of reference. Listening to the piano parts in *Duet* and *The Liner Notes*, it's easy to think of Billy Preston with The Beatles, while *Trististia Amnesia* channels Ringo's fat, thuddy drum sound from *Come Together* and the droning intro has the eastern vibe of the sitar-powered *Within You Without You*.

Cunningham has always displayed an enviable ear for a melody, but she has surpassed herself here. She packs ideas into every tune and seems fully fluent and at ease operating in a range of styles, switching tempos and feels within a single composition without ever throwing the listener off the trail. *Donovan Ellington* and *Donny Part Two* tell the story of a blacksmith running away to seek his fame and fortune and would be comfortably at home on Queen's *Night At The Opera* with their mix of rock, folk, and musical theatre. Fairport Convention's Ric Sanders brings out the sea shanty qualities of *Donny Part Two* with his jaunty fiddle playing.

Duet is a mid-album highlight with Levee and Cunningham sharing the vocal duties in a song carried along on a cheerful bouncing piano that morphs into a trippy, psychedelic guitar workout. *Suck Push Bang Blow* delivers a hefty glam rock stomp and boasts a gloriously fuzzed-out garage rock guitar solo, before the album wraps up with the brilliant *The Liner Notes*. This one draws on a laid-back lounge feel, a reminder that alongside psychedelia, the 60s were swinging, but then the song shifts gears into a rock beat before a fabulously catchy mid-section that Paul McCartney would be proud to call his own.

Two Piece Puzzle is an album that will amply reward the listener's fullest attention in appreciating both the skilfulness of the compositions and Cunningham's witty, occasionally surreal lyrics. This promises to be one of the early musical landmarks of 2022.

DAVID WEST

AMORPHIS

Halo ATOMIC FIRE

Finland's prog metal pioneers continue to be brilliant.

Amorphis have been so laudably consistent over the past three decades that it will come as no surprise that their 14th studio album is yet another corker. *Halo* sticks to the Finns' established formula, but they have rarely sounded as inspired by its creative possibilities as they do here.

Northward may be their finest album opener yet, thanks to a stirring chorus hook, sung and growled with gusto by frontman Tomi Joutsen. *On The Dark Waters* is equally dazzling, as the band's gritty riffing is born aloft on thick waves of spiralling synths. Elsewhere, *The Moon* is as epic and mysterious as its title suggests, with echoes of 80s gothic rock, a wonderfully woozy instrumental section and another towering chorus; while both *Seven Roads Come Together* and *War* combine ingenious arrangements and dark, metallic bluster with yet more life-affirming melodies.

As with every Amorphis album this century, *Halo* has no discernible weak points, and every last song delivers at least one jolting dose of folk-tinged melodic euphoria. And just to cap off another triumph, the closing *My Name Is Night* may be the most beautiful song the band have ever written. **DL**

BABER & WILEMAN

Baber & Wileman BELIEVERS ROAST

Powerful debut album from kindred-spirit prog mavericks.

Sometimes the best things happen by accident. Having previously collaborated in 2011, Matt Baber from Sanguine Hum and Karda Estra's Richard Wileman reconvened in 2020 with a view to perhaps completing a couple of tracks but this quickly grew to a full album.

There are echoes of their respective outfits but this beguiling collection of four songs and five instrumentals slip beyond any strict categorisation. The writing is crisp and flawlessly arranged. Steeped in acoustic reveries, tessellating electronica, or dramatic, magisterial themes, the cumulative effect is deeply affecting. The sparse piano and guitar of *Emperor* is lovingly burnished with radiant organ and synth, gradually wreathed reverberation. *2009* evokes a bucolic air with Karda Estra regular Amy Fry's clarinet wafting melancholic woodsmoke into the scene.

Passing Wave offers more of the duo's shapeshifting with Baber's assertive drumming against pulsing sequencers and inquisitive bass. *'This will be the end of the beginning,'* Wileman sings over the luminous closer *The Birth Of Spring*. Hopefully there's plenty more to come from these two. **SS**

DAVE BAINBRIDGE

To The Far Away OPEN SKY RECORDS

Former Iona founder and guitarist plays and pours his heart out.

A lot of music has been born out of the pandemic, but Dave Bainbridge's fourth solo album feels personal and intimate in a way that few others have managed. Unable to see his fiancée for over eight months and with their wedding on hold, Bainbridge poured his emotions into *To The Far Away*, an album that's brimming with longing, reflection and hopefulness.

The music mixes prog and celtic influences, allowing plenty of space for Bainbridge's ever-impressive guitar work. Switching between glissando lines and bracing bursts of speed, he brings firepower and articulation to his solos in *Clear Skies* and *Ghost Light*. In a bittersweet, sombre mood, *Infinitude (Region Of The Stars)* perfectly and beautifully expresses the sadness of being apart from a loved one.

The terrific line-up of contributors includes Sally Minnear on vocals, Troy Donockley on pipes and whistles, and Jon Poole on bass. The album is available with a bonus disc of demos, jams and outtakes, and a book of Bainbridge's nature photography, but there's a feast of masterfully crafted, evocative music to devour here already. **DW**

ANDY BELL

Flicker SONIC CATHEDRAL

Ride man's effortless blend of psych-pop, acoustic pickings and melody.

As co-leader of shoegazers Ride, a Britpop veteran thanks to tenures in Hurricane #1 and Oasis, a guest bass guitarist with Pink Floyd and the Mr Big behind the electronic beeps and bleeps of GLOK, Andy Bell is a musician of many hats. But it's with his solo, guitar-based material that he seems most at ease.

With 2020's *The View From Halfway Down* having made itself comfortable, his latest effort *Flicker* is spread over four sides of vinyl. Here, Bell allows himself to stretch out with the music that he's most relaxed with – 60s inspired, guitar-based dreampop that's suffused with an ingrained melodic sensibility.

The chimes, harmonies and breathy vocal delivery of *World Of Echo* evoke icy vistas like a long-lost Yuletide song and *When The Lights Go Down* is a pensive exercise in considered balladry. An air of sang-froid hangs over the album like expelled air in near freezing temperatures, a mood and feeling that's most evident in *Way Of The World*.

As with most albums that stretch beyond their usual time constraints, there's a lot of information to take in, but its rewards reveal themselves with subsequent listens. **JM**

BLACK COUNTRY, NEW ROAD

Ants From Up There NINJA TUNE

Speedy follow-up to lauded debut is less angular, but more weighty.

Having been hailed last year as the best new band in Britain following their debut album *For The First Time*, it would be understandable if Black Country, New Road had paused to take stock – yet here they are already with their second record. Despite still looking like an after-school band catapulted into the spotlight, BCNR have matured here, tempering the intensity of a debut that somehow managed to simultaneously channel both Slint and Van der Graaf Generator.

Chaos Space Marine opens the album in an explosion of Tiggerish piano, taut strings and pouting saxophone, Penguin Café Orchestra hijacked by Cardiacs. But what follows is a series of songs that showcase a more pastoral, chamber rock sound, albeit still animated by wracked bouts of eloquent angst from singer Isaac Wood – *Haldern* and *The Place Where He Inserted The Blade* are particularly impressive, the latter displaying an almost Beatles-esque bounce.

The album closes with live favourite *Basketball Shoes*, a capstone perhaps on their original trajectory of slow building post-rock married to surreal tales of Gen Z dysfunction. Next stop, the Canterbury scene apparently. **JB**

DAVID CROSS AND ANDREW KEELING

October Is Marigold NOISY RECORDS

Classical-prog superduo create evocative autumnal landscapes.

Violinist David Cross is best known for his work with King Crimson in the early 70s and flute player Andrew Keeling is a classical composer who was mentored by John Tavener. On *October Is Marigold*, the pair unite to use electronics that bring classical chamber music into experimental, sometimes avant-garde pieces.

Cross uses an electric violin with an octave pedal to increase its range into the lower cello register and, at times, makes it sound like a muted trumpet. The music is largely improvised but a sense of shape is given by the repeated use of the *Marigold* theme on piano and low violin. The songs often evoke the benign aspects of autumn – *Kingfisher* describes the bird's flight with fluttering flute and folky violin. The title track's lyrical, looped organ chords conjure an image of a country church in the mist.

But there's a darker side to October, on the cusp of autumn and winter. *The Spiking Darts That Were Trees* is disrupted by a fiercely distorted King Crimson-like violin riff, revealing the stark beauty of trees shorn of leaves. *Ever Nearer* morphs from gentle pastoral into a melodic burst of joy then a wild dervish-like dance. It's a vivid portrait of the most striking season. **NH**

THE FLOWER KINGS

By Royal Decree INSIDEOUT

Steady evolution by way of looking back in time.

Demonstrating how successfully The Flower Kings have recovered from their "difficult" fracturing and the departure of longtime keyboard player, Tomas Bodin, the ever-productive Roine Stolt captains his band through the seas of creativity for their third double CD album in two years. With Zach Kamins and Mirko DeMaio firmly settled on keyboards and drums respectively, *By Royal Decree* is an old-school TFK album on a few levels.

> **It's an old-school Flower Kings record on many levels.**

With pandemic restrictions eased, much of the album was developed and recorded with the core band in the studio together. In addition, Stolt has revisited previously unheard material, some of it dating back to before The Flower Kings existed. A further "going back in time" element is the re-appearance of Michael Stolt, Roine's brother, who last played bass on a Flower Kings album some 20 years ago.

There are classic Flower Kings moments, with both opener *The Great Pretender* and *World Gone Crazy* delivering big themes with Hasse Fröberg singing his heart out in the former and the merest sniff of a Neal Morse influence in the writing of the latter. Elsewhere *A Million Stars* delivers restrained majesty, there's the slow poignancy of *The Darkness In Your Eyes* with tasteful contributions by Rob Townsend on sax, and the crafted beauty and masterful guitar of Roine himself – check out the soloing at the start of *Funeral Pyre* and his fretboard antics in *The Soldier* and *Evolution*.

Lyrically, the album revolves around many established Flower Kings themes – reflections on the wonder and beauty of the world around us and the vastness of space, the discussions on the nature of truth and falsehoods, and the exhortations to strive to be better versions of ourselves.

Whether a function of the closer working environment or a developing musical rapport, the arrangements and orchestrations on *By Royal Decree* are particularly pleasing – check out the aforementioned instrumental *Evolution* and how it stitches keyboards, bass and Hasse Bruniusson's percussion contributions together.

Apart from the lack of a 20-plus minute epic, *By Royal Decree* delivers everything one might want and expect from The Flower Kings. Although it's hard to predict whether it will grow in fans' affections in the way that *Space Revolver*, *Unfold The Future* or the more recent *Banks Of Eden* debatably have, *By Royal Decree* is nonetheless a superb document from one of the most pre-eminent symphonic prog bands currently active and demonstrates what's possible with a combination of musical ambition, sheer talent, unashamed honesty about influences and the creative machine that is Roine Stolt.

GARY MACKENZIE

NORDIC GIANTS

Symbiosis NORDICGIANTS.CO.UK

Post-rock hymns to creativity from ever-enigmatic duo.

Nordic Giants are in the mood to celebrate. *Symbiosis* heralds a year in which Löki and Rôka Skuld will perform a series of shows to toast a decade of music and multimedia live performance, accompanied by short films, strobe lights and the customary sight of the enigmatic duo in feathered masks and pagan regalia.

This kind of sensory experience remains central to their music, which continues to mutate in fascinating ways.

> **Capable of stirring heart and soul in spectacular style.**

Symbiosis features less of the self-described "claustrophobic cinema clutter" of 2015 debut *A Séance Of Dark Delusions*, and feels more substantial than 2017's *Amplify Human Vibration*, the soundtrack to a documentary of the same name. It's a little softer, for starters, and more artfully layered. But Nordic Giants haven't forgone any of their dramatic might, merely thrown their more explosive passages into deeper relief. Emblematic of this approach is opening track *Philosophy Of Mind*, which begins with muted brass and minimal piano, firmed up by crisp beats. The sound gradually rises into something more grandiose, intercut with spoken-word samples that allude to the 'mind-body problem' advanced by Descartes centuries ago. *'I think, therefore I exist'* (a slight bastardisation of the French brainiac's big statement) appears amid whorls of synths and loops.

The overriding theme here — the interdependency of life — is reflected in the harmonious use of instrumentation. Tibetan bowls, pianos, drums, analogue synths and an ancient carnyx horn all find their way into a broad musical palette, without ever sounding less than complementary. There are, too, guest appearances from a couple of regular vocalists. Alex Hedley makes his presence felt on *Faceless*, another piece that slowly crawls into view before building to symphonic heights. The track confirms Nordic Giants' status as masters of the grand cinematic sweep. Ominously, Hedley sings of dark shadows, sadness and shapeless things, while the music finally subsides to a low whisper.

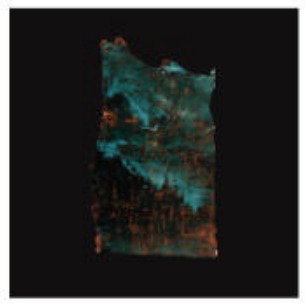
The other guest singer, Freyja, appears on the busily intense *Spheres*. This time, Nordic Giants throw themselves into a cantering percussive rhythm, the blazing heat of the music contrasting with Freyja's pure, cool, semi-operatic tones. And while *Convergence* and the mist-shrouded *Spires Of Ascendency* are fine examples of the band's greater sense of restraint, the duo are in full effect on the *Anamorphia*. Powered by syncopated beats and a spiralling synth motif, the song reaches Sigur Rós levels of ecstatic release. It's an exquisite moment and further proof that Nordic Giants are capable of stirring both heart and soul in spectacular style.

ROB HUGHES

CULT OF LUNA

The Long Road North METAL BLADE

Post-metal denizens illuminate the dark once more.



If the title of Cult Of Luna's last studio record, 2019's *A Dawn To Fear*, now seems eerily pertinent, the follow-up seems equally able to encapsulate the mood of the moment. *The Long Road North* is one of the Swedes' most cinematic and expansive records, with faint echoes of 2008's immaculate *Vertikal* and the band's much revered second album *The Beyond* from 2003.

The opening *Cold Burn* rumbles along on an infectious percussive pulse, before building to the first of countless devastating crescendos: very much a Cult Of Luna signature, but here delivered with renewed finesse. *An Offering To The Wild* is even more overwhelming: 13 minutes of noirish atmospherics and hypnotic, circular riffs.

Monstrous eruptions of slow-motion heaviness like *Blood Upon Stone* are deftly offset by the ghostly, ambient drift of *Beyond I* (featuring Swedish jazz maverick Mariam Wallentin), the post-rock fever dream of *Full Moon*, and *Beyond II*'s blissful but abstract squall of formless noise. The end result is an album that flows majestically, but with gathering menace, from beginning to end. If that sounds like some skewed metaphor for life, it probably is. **DL**

D'VIRGILIO, MORSE, JENNINGS

Troika INSIDEOUT

Three prog stars working in perfect harmony.

Sunny, uplifting and bursting with melodies, *Troika* is a welcome antidote to these toxic times. Neal Morse, his fellow ex-Spock's Beard alumnus Nick D'Virgilio and Haken's Ross Jennings worked on this remotely last year, and if the thought of these three prog stars together sounds tantalising, on record they more than live up to the billing.

What a sweet vocal blend they've stumbled across. Set to *Troika*'s main palette of acoustic guitars and hand drums, the trio's golden three-part harmonies hark back to Crosby, Stills & Nash, The Beatles, and The Beach Boys. These enrich a set of predominantly simple, direct, uncynical love songs (*Everything I Am*, *Julia*, *You Set My Soul On Fire*). When they crank things up later those harmonies nod towards Queen (the charging *King For A Day*), with toughest tune *Second Hand Sons* a widescreen mash-up of Hendrix's *Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)* and Foreigner's *Hot Blooded*.

A Change Is Gonna Come is a lament for these strange days of *'broken families, and lying leaders at the top'*. Until that change comes, this beautiful, pure-hearted album offers a positive balm. **GRM**

MARIUSZ DUDA

Interior Drawings MARIUSZDUDA.BANDCAMP.COM

Riverside/Lunatic Soul man's third lockdown trip.

Any hopes that the final instalment of Mariusz Duda's electronic-skewed 'Lockdown Trilogy' will offer a chill-out experience after its aptly-titled predecessor *Claustrophobic Universe*, are misplaced judging by the often anxious, eerie textures spread across *Interior Drawings*.

The urgent piano arpeggios of *Racing Thoughts* trip over themselves as they run around giddily to a padding techno pulse, and elsewhere the mood is similarly uneasy. Duda's instinct for unorthodox time signatures lends *Shapes In Notebooks* an impatient feel as its tapping rhythm builds, further punctuated by the sound of a pen scribbling urgently on paper – a recurring sound across the eight tracks. *Prisoner By Request* offers a retro-futurist soundscape, as Tangerine Dream-style trickles of techno and ghostly vocals, but the effect is similarly alluring.

Even as *Dream Of Calm* offers blissfully undulating keys as if inviting meditation, the nagging scratch of pencil on sketchpad suggests Duda battling to find peace as those creative itches keep distracting him. The trilogy is complete, but don't expect to wait too long before the next outpouring from this impulsive, unpredictable Pole. **JS**

GONG

Pulsing Signals KSCOPE

Belting live album from three shows on Gong's 2019 tour.

This is essentially a stopgap release as, being an international band, Gong didn't think it feasible to piece together any new music remotely during lockdown. But it also demonstrates just how potent they are live, with 70s classics such as *You Can't Kill Me* sitting seamlessly alongside new material.

Daevid Allen's decision, before his death in 2015, to pass the baton onto singer and guitarist Kavus Torabi and these exceptional musicians seems wise indeed. Allen's structural vocabulary is woven into their new material, like the knotty guitar motifs and twisting, eastern-tinged riffs of *Rejoice*. The "pulsing signals" of the title might refer to the opening section of *Forever Recurring* with its shuddering guitar loops, and Dave Sturt's bass and Ian East's sax giving it a systems music feel, before drummer Cheb Nettles makes his entry, turning the rhythmic emphasis around. The highlight is a lengthy *Master Builder* from *You* (1974). It starts like a meditation or breathing exercise with Fabio Golfetti's glissando guitar setting the scene, but when the glorious om riff kicks in, it hurtles round and round like a thrilling barrel-rolling cosmic rollercoaster ride. **MB**

HARKOAN

Traveler HARKOAN.BANDCAMP.COM

Brief but captivating introduction to Californian alt-proggers.

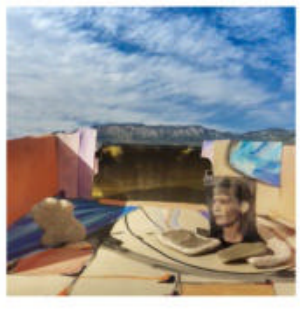
It can sometimes be difficult to make an EP feel sufficiently representative and impactful, yet that's exactly what Californian duo Harkoan accomplish here. Drummer Elijah Rosgard and vocalist/guitarist/keyboardist Nick Gegan's follow-up to 2019's *Self Portrait* continues its predecessor's preference for energised melodies with enough instrumental sophistication to tick the box marked 'prog'.

This balance is most evident on opener *Pariahs Son*, a driving dose of intricate hard rock that essentially merges the experimentation of Camper Van Beethoven and the rhythmic power of Karnivool. Although the rustic and mildly eccentric *The Nomad* fits that description as well the remaining three tracks offer something significantly different. *Lost Soul* begins as a brooding piano ode in waltz time that eventually erupts into a bluesy freakout, while the quirky *Time Enough At Last* is dreamier and more orchestral. *Marigold* caps things off with jazzy introspection, ensuring that *Traveler* lives up to its name by traversing many styles and sentiments in a short amount of time. **JMB**

JENNY HVAL

Classic Objects 4AD

Norwegian storyteller weaves another dreamlike web.



Although Jenny Hval has gained acclaim as both a novelist and a songwriter, it sounds as if her diaries would be just as compelling were she ever to publish them. There's a typically journal-like feel to her lyrics on this eighth solo studio set, and allied to the warm washes of electronica surrounding them on *Classic Objects*, they're as arresting as any printed narrative.

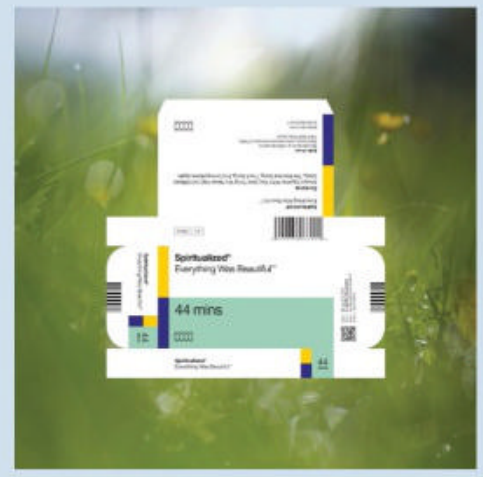
'My mother came to the city at 21,' she recalls on *American Coffee*. 'When she had me the midwife looked her in the eye and said, *"Poor baby you're so scared."'* Elsewhere, the irresistibly moody synth clouds that introduce the title track reel the listener in tandem with the curious recollection: '*There was a painter in my first studio space that I remember/ She used to attach her own hair to her paintings/They were stacked in the hallway/Depicting faces, desperate but hopeful/ A row of death masks.*'

Her voice, redolent of other Nordic dreamers such as Stina Nordenstam and Emiliana Torrini, adds further allure, and although the topline melodies can meander off into the ether sometimes, by that point Hval could be warbling the phone book and she'd still cast a potent spell. **JS**

SPIRITUALIZED

Everything Was Beautiful BELLA UNION

British psych veterans overdose on the overblown.



Recorded at 11 different studios and featuring more than 30 musicians, *Everything Was Beautiful* might not be particularly ambitious by Spiritualized standards, but it certainly makes most other bands' efforts seem a bit feeble. As ever, the multilayered magnitude of Jason Pierce's psychedelic creations takes the breath away from the very start of his band's ninth full-length: *Always Together With You* is both archetypal Pierce nursery rhyme and sumptuous, symphonic reverie, and one of his most immediate and affecting songs yet.

> **One of the most potent expressions of Pierce's vision to date.**

If 2018's *And Nothing Hurt* was a more stripped-down and delicate take on the Spiritualized formula, this album marks a partial return to the widescreen psychedelia of the band's critical peaks, *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space* and *Let It Come Down*. With a skittering krautrock beat and huge surges of brass and strings, *Best Thing You Never Had* is garage rock stretched to the mystic max, Pierce's deadpan vocals hanging in the foreground like illicit secrets. *Let It Bleed* is an impossibly lush ballad; laced with the magical ripple of a Hammond organ, it waltzes gracefully towards a startling gospel finale. In contrast, *Crazy* is a beautifully elegant and unfussy country rock tear-jerker, with Pierce demonstrating his gifts for both pathos and the gentle subversion of clichés.

The album's second half dives deeper into the mushroom tea, and offers some of the most adventurous and mind-bending music that Spiritualized have ever released. *Mainline* harks back to the hazy throb of 1995's *Pure Phase*, but with a warmer and bigger overall sound. Three minutes of exquisite, bubbling psych pass by before Pierce starts to sing, and then his circular refrain builds and builds, with more brass, more strings, exuberant backing vocals and the reassuring howl of a Fripp-esque fuzz guitar motif all fizzing in the mix.

The A Song (Laid In Your Arms) maintains the maxed-out approach over a loping, bluesy groove: roughly halfway through the song, an insane storm of freeform noise erupts, before a chaotic and adrenaline-drenched final fade to black. Best of all, the closing *I'm Coming Home Again* shares a few slivers of DNA with *Cop Shoot Cop*, the astonishing closing track from *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space*. Ten minutes of meandering voodoo rock, it's the closest that Spiritualized have come to penning an authentic swamp blues song, and *Everything Was Beautiful*'s wonderfully organic and live-sounding production only adds to the unfolding magic.

Grand ambitions realised: this is one of the most potent expressions of Pierce's vision to date.

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LOOP

Sonancy COOKING VINYL

Croydon's loudest export return in triumph.

Gradually snapping into sharp focus through a haze of preparatory feedback, Loop's first album in 32 years immediately startles with the crisp, driving, motorik momentum of *Interference*. Setting an immediately engaging sonic template for the remainder of the south London innovator's fourth record, it's a fat-free distillation of all that's irresistible about Loop's enduring MO: the mesmeric monotony of early Stooges, minimal astro-psych riff-storms Hawkwind, nagging mecha Neu! beats and spiralling electro dystopia of Suicide. Key elements, familiar from Loop's illustrious past explode in a seamless alliance of intensified sonics.

Long-standing focal point Robert Hampson's enigmatic lyrics are, as usual, cannily buried just deep enough in the mix to pass them off as tantalising conundrums, while the overall sound is manipulated beautifully in a complementary production that accentuates the intrinsic otherness of the material. As the headphone-essential plummet of Fermion phases in and out of focus in an ear-boggling manner reminiscent of Eno's Roxy Music, you can't help but be sold on this eminently 21st century Loop redux. **IF**

MADMESS

Rebirth HASSLE RECORDS

Portuguese space rockers blast off with style.

Birthed from the vibrant underground rock scene of Porto and now based in London, power trio Madmess unleash a mind-warping blast of heavy psychedelia and space rock on their debut album. Musically, *Rebirth* picks up where the group left off with their excellent 2019 self-titled EP, consisting of five primarily instrumental tracks of cosmic soundscapes and crunchy riffs.

The trio tracked everything live in the studio which lends a combustible chemistry to the proceedings. Rather than endlessly layering in more effects over the same lick, they introduce a parade of musical ideas, twisting and reshaping each one while exploring the limits of their dynamic range. Bassist Vasco Vasconcelos and drummer Luis Moura can channel the laid-back, trippy vibe that opens *Shape Shifter* or dig in hard to the scuzzy stoner groove of *Stargazer*. When guitarist Ricardo Sampaio takes to the mic on the latter and on *Mind Collapse*, his voice is treated like another instrument, nestled amid the music as another texture to explore.

Thrumming with energy and an apparently bottomless well of monster riffs, *Rebirth* is an intoxicating ride. **DW**

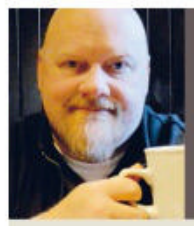
DUNCAN MARQUISS

Wires Turned Sideways In Time BASIN ROCK

The Phantom Band guitarist goes full Scots-kosmiche.

Glasgow's The Phantom Band have contributed smart, electronica-laced indie art rock to our scene since 2009's *Checkmate Savage*. Calling a hiatus in 2015 after the band's gear was stolen from their van while on tour in France, guitarist Duncan Marquiss began gigging solo – and now he's ready to present the fruits of several years' labour to what is sure to be eager ears.

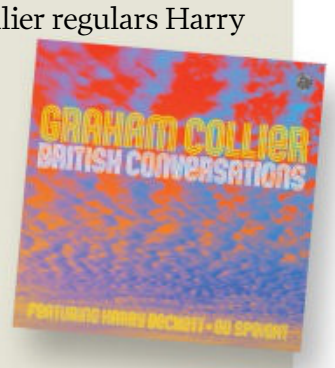
With every track a biggie (bar the three-minute title tune), Marquiss has created a truly immersive, gorgeously-produced instrumental debut that reaches for Riley, Eno and Rother soundscapes and adds distinctly Caledonian and Americana-esque melodies. Lead track *Drivenhalle* is a prime example, a meditative drone underpinning xylophone, tambourine and finger-picked rondos that spiral gently towards the stars. *Sweeps* lulls us with spacey exotica, segueing into *Fixed Action Pattern*'s Swiss chime and melodica tick-tock. Then *Tracks* brings a first dose of acoustic cosmic Americana (part two is *Minor History*), and *Murmer Double* is a gentle fuzz-guitar campfire dance, where the action on the bass strings is low and reverberant. Don't get the Headspace app, buy this record instead. **JK**



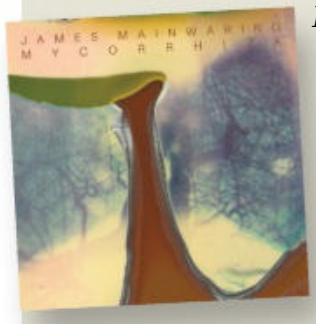
JAZZ PROG

Sid Smith rounds up the best releases from prog's jazzier reaches.

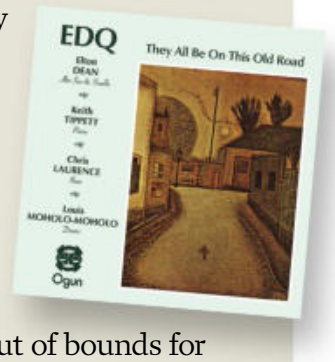
Graham Collier's *British Conversations* (My Only Desire Records) was recorded live in 1975 with the 15-piece Swedish Radio Jazz Group and Collier regulars Harry Beckett (trumpet and flugelhorn) and Ed Speight (guitar). Collier's trademark mix of taut arrangements and strong melodies provide an ebullient framework for all to shine. In a halo of luscious brass harmonies, Beckett darts and dives to dazzling effect. The slow-building *Mackerel Sky* finds Speight turning on a Fripp-like distortion to rock things up. Within the overall arc of the five pieces, there are microcosms of funky interplay, rhythmic shifts, and ear-worm riffs that Nucleus fans would appreciate. When Collier died in 2011 he left behind a rich and diverse catalogue but having this previously unreleased suite added to his canon of great works feels rather special.



Saxophonist **James Mainwaring**'s quietly brilliant *Mycorrhiza* (Discus) gathers birdsong, a classical trio, occasional vocals, discrete electronica, jazzy improv, and scored themes into a sequence of interconnected threads whose contrasting moods surprise and delight as they spread and evolve. At times it could almost be outtakes from *Laughing Stock*-period Talk Talk.

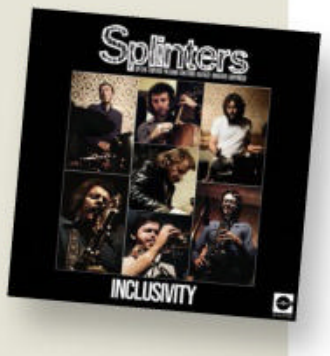


After quitting Soft Machine in 1972 Elton Dean fronted a variety of groups, of which the **Elton Dean Quartet**'s *They All Be On This Old Road* (Ogun) is arguably one of the best. First released in 1977 it now includes 40 minutes, not on the original release. Dean is on fiery form sparking off Keith Tippett's fervent piano and Chris Laurence (bass) and Louis Moholo-Moholo (drums) stunning rhythm section. Mixing old standards, classic Coltrane, improv, and a clutch of spiky original compositions, nothing is out of bounds for this quartet.



Indonesian guitarist **Dewa Budjana**'s *Naurora* (MoonJune) continues a maturing trajectory with compositions that seamlessly incorporate elements of traditional music, jazz, and Canterbury-esque stylings. As a soloist, he gets to the heart of the matter through briskly concise runs in the company of heavyweight pals who include Oregon's Paul McCandless, Simon Phillips, and, John McLaughlin cohort, Gary Husband, among others, all providing committed and inspired support.

Opulent doesn't quite describe the packaging for **Splinters**' *Inclusivity* (Jazz In Britain). Housed within a 12-inch hardcover book boasting superb photos and a revealing 32-page essay, two live recordings on three CDs feature an occasional septet that combines jazzers from different generations and traditions. The improvised music is largely thoughtful and attentive rather than confrontational, It occasionally becomes a touch speculative, but when you have Phil Seamen, John Stevens, Tubby Hayes, Stan Tracey Kenny Wheeler, Trevor Watts, and Jeff Clyne doing the speculating it's definitely worth listening to.



TEARS FOR FEARS

The Tipping Point CONCORD

Reunited duo serve up elegant prog-pop on first album in 17 years.

When they rose to fame in the early 1980s on the back of hit singles *Mad World* and *Change*, Tears For Fears' Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith seemed like many other post-punk duos with an eye on the big time. But there was a complexity and intelligence not far beneath the surface that set the Genesis and King Crimson-loving pair apart from their peers – their 1983 debut *The Hurting* was a concept album of sorts, while 1985's *Songs From The Big Chair* is Exhibit A for smuggling prog into the pop charts (check out *Broken* for proof).

> **Looking for calm in the chaos, it plays out with a stately grace.**

1989's lush, dazzling *The Seeds Of Love* fractured Orzabal and Smith's union – a state of affairs that wouldn't be healed until the pair reunited in 2005 for the knowingly-titled *Everybody Loves A Happy Ending*. They've intermittently played live since then, but it took personal tragedy – namely the alcohol-related death of Orzabal's wife of 35 years, Caroline, and his own subsequent personal illness – to prompt them to return to the studio to record their first album in 17 years.

Considering *The Tipping Point* is largely a rumination on grief, it's an incredibly breezy and smart record that displays all of the duo's historic strengths – melody, killer choruses and gravity. Opening track *No Small Thing* is the song that brought them back together, playing like "18 year olds" with acoustic guitars at Smith's apartment in LA. Strangely evocative of a Roger Waters solo track, its gradual build and talk of punishing the child for *'flying too high'* takes the listener right back to the psychodrama of *The Hurting*.

The title track captures the moment when Orzabal realised the enormity of the situation of his wife's illness; yet when he sings of *'the ghost knocking at my door/You know that I can't love you more'*, it could also be a reflection on his and Smith's sometimes turbulent partnership. *Please Be Happy* examines Orzabal watching his wife's depression at close quarters. *The Master Plan*, a critique of those who have tried to steer the group, buoyed by soaring strings and Orzabal's impassioned vocal. The brooding *Rivers Of Mercy* is the album's centrepiece. Looking for calm in the chaos of the pandemic, it plays out with a stately grace.

The Tipping Point is a pleasure from start to finish, demonstrating that 80s acts do not need to be lost in a haze of DayGlo and deely-boppers to continue to make their mark. The themes Tears For Fears have pursued, on and off, for the last 40 years are the same as they have always been, yet now they have the weight of age and experience behind them. It makes for elegant, mature music.

DARYL EASLEA

MERI

Something Out Of Place MERIISFEVERISH.BANDCAMP.COM

Former Eluveitie violinist's latest solo offering.

Violinist and backing vocalist during a decade with Swiss folk-metallers Eluveitie, Meri Tadic gathered a loyal fanbase after venturing out under her own steam with Slavic folk-influenced project Irij. Now under her Christian name she's teamed up with former Coroner and Celtic Frost guitarist Oliver Amberg for a heavier affair that puts the emphasis on a gutsier rock-oriented sound.

A blend of electronic sheen, knotty guitar twang and husky vocal yearning help the title track take flight, fuelled by Tadic's cinematic string arrangements, but on the more conventional rock bluster of *Luxuria* and *To Be*, Tadic's violin is meshed into the mix more deeply than it was on her earlier material, and at times it feels like the sound has lost a little character amid the dry ice and symphonic metal sturm und drang.

But her songwriting and vocal delivery, alternating vampish menace with cooing vulnerability still grips convincingly when the drama is cranked up, as felt in *One*'s pounding, ascending riff patterns and on *Palooka*, wherein Amberg's dynamic banks of guitar churn beneath Tadic's emotive voice and breathy, ethereal trails of backing vocals. **JS**

MIND FURNITURE

An Illustrated Map Of The Heart MINDFURNITURE1.BANDCAMP.COM

Polished prog rock from the States.

It's been almost 15 years since 2007's *Hoop Of Flame* evoked vintage art rockers Love and ELO with its forceful songwriting and classical heft. In that time, Californian quartet Mind Furniture have been hard at work ensuring that their third LP, *An Illustrated Map Of The Heart*, is as diverse and dramatic as possible.

True to that intention, the whole conceptual sequence manages a lovely balance between mainstream charisma and multifaceted ambition. It kicks off with *Ride By Myself*, a versatile belter that mixes the everyman assertiveness of Bruce Springsteen and the delicate nuances of Moon Safari (particularly in terms of its vocal harmonies and piano motifs). Tracks such as *I Broke It* and *Here In The Future* uphold that multilayered ruggedness, which makes them great juxtapositions to proggier ventures like the Jethro Tull-esque *Take Out An Ad* and the ELP-esque *I Have Known Real Love*.

If push comes to shove, removing a couple of relatively generic tunes – *Underneath The World* and *Can't Find My Heart* – would lead to a more succinct and consistent statement overall, but even they don't keep the record from being a terrific ride. **JMB**

CLIVE MITTEN

Tales From A Misspent Youth Vol 1 BUMNOTE

Twelfth Night multi-instrumentalist pays homage to the classics.

Having rescored his band's most epic moments on 2021's *Suite Cryptique*, Twelfth Night bassist/keyboard player/composer Clive Mitten now treads on sacred ground, reimagining nine classics by other prog artists.

Spread over two CDs, it sees Mitten putting a new twist on his cinematic orchestral approach, using just a mini-Moog and a British Library-sized selection of musical samples. The attention to detail is striking, such as the harps on Supertramp's *Bloody Well Right*'s melody line while marimbas and vibraphone bring a jazzy, upbeat feel to Jethro Tull's *Living In The Past*. *Supper's Ready* is an intricate, complex aural web, *Echoes* incorporates influences of Mozart and Beethoven along with humpback whale song, while Rush's *Countdown* and *La Villa Strangiato* segues in a more electronica style over several movements featuring guitars, vibraphone and low piano. Not all of it works – specifically the cacophonous denouement to *Tubular Bells*.

This could prove to be a Marmite album – purists will wonder why bother but the more inquisitive may discover fresh musical insights that intrigue and delight. **AR**

NAXATRAS

IV NAXATRAS.BANDCAMP.COM

Greek psychedelicists broaden their line-up and musical horizons.

On their fourth album, Greece's Naxatras expand their line-up from a trio to a quartet with the addition of Pantelis Kargas on keyboards. It marks an evolution in their overall sound and style, moving away from the psychedelic jams of their previous releases and into full-blown prog and space rock.

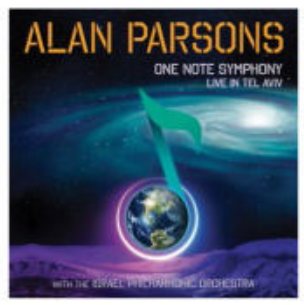
There's an unmistakable sci-fi theme to the album as Naxatras sail out into the cosmos on *Journey To Narahmon*, which features a gorgeous guest vocal from Evi Seitanidou and powerful playing from the whole group with John Delias' chunky guitar riffs complimented by tight syncopation from bassist John Vagenas and drummer Kostas Charizanis. Other highlights include the Floydian vibe of *Horizon*, with Delias' bluesy solo, and *The Battle Of Crystal Fields*, which is the perfect soundtrack to a widescreen intergalactic showdown.

IV is a departure from the raw aesthetic of their early albums, offering a more polished and conspicuously produced listen. The result is a compelling, immersive experience that marries technically accomplished playing with vivid musical landscapes. Positively their best yet. **DW**

ALAN PARSONS

One Note Symphony: Live In Tel Aviv FRONTIERS

Yet another Live Project album, this time with added orchestra.



Completist fans of Alan Parsons might feel a little exploited by the fact he has released two live albums within a few months of each other. But while *One Note Symphony* features a similar tracklisting to last year's *The Never Ending Show: Live In The Netherlands*, he can justifiably point out that this 2019 performance in Israel offers a rare USP: the accompaniment of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

Silence And I from 1982's *Eye In The Sky* didn't feature on the Netherlands set and the orchestra lend it a majestic feel here, while a longer version of the medley *The Breakdown/The Raven* sees the synth rock feel of the usual live version dressed in impressively opulent accompaniment.

The dramatic swell is undoubtedly enhanced on *Don't Let It Show* and *Standing On Higher Ground* before we go full steam ahead into Parsons' reading of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (best known from Disney's *Fantasia*), which appeared on his last studio album *The Secret* but which sounds positively massive here. It's the kind of thing a live orchestra can do that the studio approach of 'instant epic, just add strings' and sequenced live sounds can't really shake a conductor's stick at. **JS**

PLAYGROUNDED

The Death Of Death PELAGIC

Prog metal meets electronic in Greek rockers' fine new LP.

The second album from Athens' Playgrounded is certainly no Greek tragedy. With *The Death Of Death*, the quintet take a bold leap forward to become one of Europe's more dynamic prog metal bands.

Don't expect noodly virtuosity though, as the group mix Porcupine Tree-esque introspection and swelling with post-rock atmosphere. Like Steven Wilson and co, a liberal serving of electronic plays a vital part in Playgrounded's sound and helps to set them apart from other chug-chuggers; *Rituals* pulses and prowls, while *Tomorrow's Rainbow* opens with some electronic dreaming fit for a Massive Attack outtake. The take-home track here is the part-grimy, part-radiating *The Road Out Of The Flood*, which shapeshifts through time signatures amid lurching basslines yet keeps the groove. Singer Stavros Markonis, incidentally, is also a composer for film and TV and that cinematic aura seeps into much of the songwriting.

Equally comfortable with instrumental passages as they are monolithic choruses, Playgrounded have found their identity – mournful yet galvanising, and certainly deserving of a wider audience. **CC**

PSYCHEDELIC PROG

Take a trip with **Rob Hughes** as he seeks out the latest mind-expanding music.

Multi-instrumentalist Jarrod Gosling is best known as one half of both I Monster and Cobalt Chapel, but **Regal Worm** is very much a solo enterprise. *The Hideous Goblink* (Quatermass), the Sheffield operator's fourth album, is a feast of analogue goodness, layered with vintage organs, Mellotron, guitars, found sounds and more. The cantering *Action By HAVOC* and *Underground Comix* make for thrilling modernist space rock, while his Cobalt Chapel partner Cecilia Fage handles vocals and choral arrangements on post-Goblin hyper-suite *Pollinators*.

Californian trio **La Luz** are on their fourth release too. *La Luz* (Hardly Art) is the best yet from songwriter/guitarist Shana Cleveland, bassist Lena Simon and keyboardist Alice Sandahl. Its captivating blend of cosmic folk pop and languorous psychedelia, lightly dusted in reverb, comes with woozy harmonies and renewed dynamics. *Watching Cartoons* and the pulsating *In The Pines* are terrific, though the real keeper is the majestic *Goodbye Ghost*.

As indicated by the title of their debut album *Let The Festivities Begin!* (City Slang), **Los Bitchos** are party starters with a real kick. The quartet hail from London, Australia, Sweden and Uruguay, their fizzy instrumentals pulling from twangy surf-rock, exotica, Eastern psychedelia, calypso and Latino funk. Produced by Franz Ferdinand's Alex Kapranos in Phil Manzanera's studio, it's enthralling stuff, from the ringing *The Link Is About To Die* to the punchier, fuzz-tripping *Lindsay Goes To Mykonos*, based on Lindsay Lohan's decision to open a luxury Greek island hotel.

New York-based Latinx quartet **Combo Chimbita** take their cue from the Afro-futurist aesthetic of Sun Ra to fashion their own distinct brand of tropical wonder. Latest effort *Ire* (ANTI-) finds Carolina Oliveros (vocals, guacharaca), Niño Lento es Fuego (guitar), Prince of Queens (bass, synths) and Dilemastronauta (drums) addressing cultural legacy, identity and spiritualism against a rich backdrop of Latin-American rhythms and psych-funk bliss. *Babalawo* and *De Frente*, in particularly, are revelatory.

Brazilian twosome **Atalhos** are a little more chilled. *A Tentação Do Fracasso* (Costa Futuro), translation: 'The Temptation of Failure', is an immersive journey into chiming dream-pop. Gabriel Soares and Conrado Passarelli cite War On Drugs and Wilco as chief inspirations, but there are also strong flavours of 80s neo-psych in their swirling sound, filtered through waves of tropicália. At times they sound like Caetano Veoloso channelling The Dukes Of Stratosphear.

And for those who prefer something heavier, Sweden's **Sleepwulf** aim to conquer with proto-doom distortion on *Sunbeams Curl* (Heavy Psych Sounds). Riffs and stoner grooves dominate as the quartet examine ancient mysticism and occultist philosophy, with songs such as *Sex Magic Manifestation* and the frankly unstoppable *Toad Licker Mushroom Picker*.

VOIVOD

Synchro Anarchy CENTURY MEDIA

Canadian veterans' 15th album is seriously progressive metal.

There's a legion of makeweight prog metal bands who believe a *Blade Runner*-y concept album with a 25-minute title track and some widdly bits in 9/8 makes them interesting by default. And then there's Voivod, who operate on an altogether higher plane. The veteran Canadian band reminded their audience what they can do with 2018's superb, Juno Award-winning *The Wake*, and they've turned up the dials for their mind-boggling new one.

> **They leave the prog metal pretenders in their dust.**

Their 15th studio album, *Synchro Anarchy* is a blast of properly progressive metal. Once again, Voivod explore prog's thematic scope and questing spirit, using the tones and tropes of metal. Opener *Paranormalium* is typical, with its clangorous, dark and doomy guitars, a bouncing metallic groove with rhythmic twists, a thrashy chorus, and Denis 'Snake' Bélanger at his garrulous best on the breakdown: *'Some contradictions storm inside my head/Doubt's alteration blurs my common sense/False information becomes conviction.'*

Bélanger's voice is a crucial thread in Voivod's psychedelic, psychological fabric. He can shred the larynx as required, but is laconically, weirdly tuneful where others would get histrionic. On sci-fi high point *Planet Eaters* he narrates a galactic trip with an accelerating climax that convincingly conveys that, given the chance, mankind would screw up the off-world colonies as surely as it has Earth.

When Voivod grandstand, they do it together. If a lesser band tried to speed up the way they do on *Mind Clock*, the wheels would surely come off. The title track's tricky snare shifts, and the double kick drum-powered *Memory Failure* are just two markers of drummer Michel 'Away' Langevin's remarkable control. *Holographic Thinking*'s frequent melodic and rhythmic handbrake turns are typical of the record as a whole, and whether at the low or dusty end, bassist Dominic 'Rocky' LaRoche is right there with him, as on the urgent *Sleeves Off*, and *Planet Eaters*' sludgy kick-off.

Daniel 'Chewy' Mongrain's bone-crunching guitars and blistering, almost Holdsworthian solos power and stud the music. He speaks Voivod's idiosyncratic melodic language, which draws on atonality, dissonance, heavy metal's love for that evil, Sabbathy 'devil's chord' and the ominous scales that underpin it. And all this is delivered with guts. Again, on the punky, catchy *The World Today* Voivod are totally connected and locked in, the whole greater than the parts.

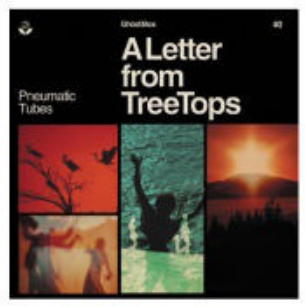
Even more intense, challenging and nuanced than *The Wake*, *Synchro Anarchy* is a lot. Forty years in, Voivod continue to push out into their own space, leaving those prog metal pretenders in their dust, gawping up.

GRANT MOON

PNEUMATIC TUBES

A Letter From TreeTops GHOST BOX

Blissful electro-psych from Mercury Rev keys and wind guy.



Pneumatic Tubes is multi-instrumentalist Jesse Chandler, keyboard and woodwind player for Midlake and Mercury Rev. While drawing on the same pool of mystic, psychedelic Americana as those groups, *A Letter From TreeTops* is an instrumental paean to the wilds of upstate New York where Chandler grew up, that sits somewhere between the rural kosmische of Cluster and the electro nostalgia of Boards Of Canada. Yet while much of this music has a sun-dappled, magic hour feel to it, it's grounded by a hint of melancholy, with the album recorded shortly after the death of Chandler's father.

Joyous Lake sets the tone, a delicate weaving of vintage keys against Moog, bass and the slow beat of a tom, a warm bath of organic electronica as blue-sky clouds roll overhead. The luminous drift of *The Big Deep* voyages further out into space, like reimagined music for Carl Sagan's *Cosmos*, while the primitive drum machine and radiophonic waves of *Mumbly-Peg* are soothed by gentle clarinet. The slightly manic robot disco of *Saw Teeth* introduces a sudden change of pace, but the chiming folk guitar and super mellow flute of *Witch Water* restores the beatific vibe. **JB**

QUINTESSENCE

I See QUINT-ESSENCE.BANDCAMP.COM

Russian proggers create a unique and thrilling sound.

The third album from Quintessence (not to be confused with the late 60s English band of the same name) may present hurdles for non-Russian speakers. While the St Petersburg group's song titles are in English, as is their explanation of the overarching theme (a journey into the modern mind with all its struggles, contradictions and mysteries), the lyrics are in their native language.

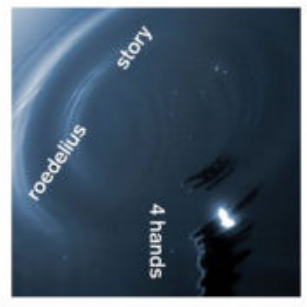
Linguistic issues aside, *I See* – expertly mixed by The Pineapple Thief's Bruce Soord – is an intriguing modern prog record. Sonically, it evokes *In Absentia*-era Porcupine Tree, although Quintessence have mixed genres to create their own compelling sound. Opening track *Angel* combines a reggae beat with classical piano, melodic hooks and a quicksilver guitar solo, while *Metamorphosis* features warm, wordless vocals with driving guitar, a baroque breakdown section with uplifting violin, and a liquid synth solo from guest Adam Holzman.

Vocalist Elizaveta Godunova makes the leap from the shouted punky vocals of *I Choose My Own Way* to soaring soprano in the chorus of *No Limits*. As a whole, it's inventive and impressive, even if the lyrics remain a mystery. **NH**

ROEDELIUS & STORY

4 Hands ERASED TAPES

Intimate musical conversation between two friends.



In the 1970s American composer, Tim Story wrote Cluster's Hans-Joachim Roedelius a fan letter that sparked a 40-year friendship and several collaborations. The latest began after Roedelius visited Story in 2019 and left him with a number of piano improvisations. Later, having assimilated the moods and vagaries of Roedelius' playing, Story added his own embellishments, crafting new melodies, cadences, and harmonies in and around the original solo piano parts.

The result is a captivating dialogue between two personalities although where one starts and the other ends is impossible to determine. The pace is gentle and while it's possible to make comparisons with the languid airs of Harold Budd or 2020's *Mixing Colours* by Roger and Brian Eno, the melodic detail and depth feel a shade sharper and more intense.

As each of the short 11 tunes spreads out like a garland of delicate blooms, occasionally strings are muted to fashion complementary percussive accents and nuances. Story's synth-orientated sound design heard on their earlier works together are absent here but this sparseness allows the music to ring out with a startling lucidity. **SS**

MICHAEL ROTHER & VITTORIA MACCABRUNI

As Long As The Light GROENLAND RECORDS

The influential guitarist teams up with Italian musician for an impressive pairing.

Though he's been a regular on the live circuit, recorded material by former Neu! guitarist Michael Rother has been thin on the ground throughout the 21st century. While 2020's *Dreaming* – his first full album since 2004 – saw him returning to the synth work he pioneered under the Harmonia banner, here Rother fully spreads his wings.

Joined by his partner Vittoria Maccabruni, Rother explores dreamy ambient landscapes, synthetic pulses and propulsive rhythms that add up to his most intriguing solo music. Maccabruni's role cannot be understated as a huge chunk of the sounds contained here emanated from ideas she'd been stockpiling over the passing of the years. With Rother refining these sketches, the melding of electronica with his trademark singing guitar coalesce seamlessly into a satisfying entity.

Witness the pensive waves of *You Look At Me*, which are augmented by Maccabruni's seductive vocals. Rother's guitar is unobtrusive, adding colour and texture. Best of all is closer *Happy*, a gorgeous, slow-burning track that smoulders before igniting under those familiar motorik beats. **JM**

SILENT SKIES

Nectar NAPALM

US-Swedish duo's collaboration quietly goes from strength to strength.

Barely a year after they launched their collaboration as Silent Skies with debut album *Satellites*, Evergrey vocalist Tom Englund and piano virtuoso Vikram Shankar have returned with a set of songs that swirl with the same superficially soothing yet frequently melancholic currents.

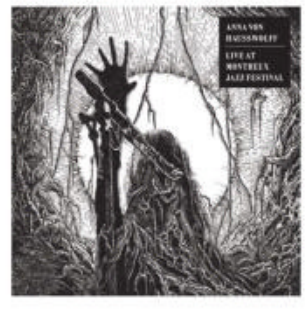
Nectar doesn't deviate from the template laid down on *Satellites*. Warm-bath electronics and Shankar's sparse piano provide the canvas on which Englund can paint (Leprous violinist Raphael Weinroth-Browne adds extra texture to several tracks). Restraint is the watchword once again, though *Taper* and *Neverending* are never sedentary – the latter subtly builds and swells until it could act as the soundbed for a lavish BBC nature documentary.

There are moments when things stray into hotel lounge music territory – *The One* is too syrupy for its own good. But elsewhere, the sparseness is strikingly effective, as on *Cold* or the instrumental title track, the latter of which owes a debt to Italian composer Ludovico Einaudi. Most impressively, the pair never resort to musical grandstanding to summon emotion – all the power of *Nectar* is in its low-key approach. **DE**

ANNA VON HAUSSWOLFF

Live at Montreux Jazz Festival SOUTHERN LORD

Thrilling live record from pipe organ-playing doom-prog maverick.



Anna von Hausswolff says that a friend in Switzerland first piqued her interest in performing at the Montreux Jazz Festival in the early 2010s, but it wasn't until after his passing that she was finally invited to play in 2018.

This album was captured at that year's event, it's both a reminder of her formidable live presence and a tribute to her late friend. Drawing on her two most recent albums at the time, 2015's *The Miraculous* and 2018's *Dead Magic*, it effortlessly displays her range as well as both the uniqueness and flexibility of the corner of music she inhabits. Her sprawling, pipe organ-led pieces draw on both the power of doom metal and the ever-shifting inventiveness of prog. The swirling climax of *Come Wander With Me/ Deliverance* is the standout instrumental moment.

However it's Hausswolff's vocal cracks and shrieks, with her sister Maria adding additional vocals, that really hit the mark, on *Pomperipossa* and the 20-minute *Ugly And Vengeful*.

Some of von Hausswolff's French tour dates were cancelled at the end of 2021 over security concerns due to Catholic protestors. This could be what they were afraid of. **AL**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

Featuring IQ/Arena/Jadis bassist John Jowitt, **Drifting Sun** is a traditional, neo-style prog rock band initiated by French keyboardist/composer Pat Sanders in the 90s. The latest in a quality catalogue, *Forsaken Innocence* (driftingsun.bandcamp.com) might be their best yet. Jowitt, Sanders and guitarist Mathieu Spaeter are virtuoso players, but the focus is on songcraft over widdle. *King Of The Country*, *Dementium* and the two-part title track are anthemic and dramatic, and singer Jargon brings personality and expression to this assured, polished prog record.

The cover of **Alvablot**'s new record *Harmonic Dystopia* (alvablot.se) is a pretty accurate illustration of the music therein. It's written, performed and produced by seasoned Swedish multi-instrumentalist Petter Karlsson, who describes this aptly as 'fantasy rock'. Karlsson's voice is dramatic, his arrangements metal-symphonic, and his guitars and synths strident as he throws himself into fairy tale tunes such as *Golden Elf*, *Elysium Road* and *Dark Princess*. It's Devin Townsend versus Nightwish — enjoyably overblown tosh done with winning conviction by a serious musical talent.

Post-rock trio **Final Coil** draw from well of The Pineapple Thief and Tool, but *Somnambulant II* (Wormhole Death) comes with a hefty dose of 80s Depeche Mode too. Processed, Dave Gahan-esque vocals, swathes of keyboards, machine-like drums and industrial guitars evoke a dark, solipsistic, student-bedsit atmosphere. It's a pretty glum, po-faced listen, but the compositions are strong.

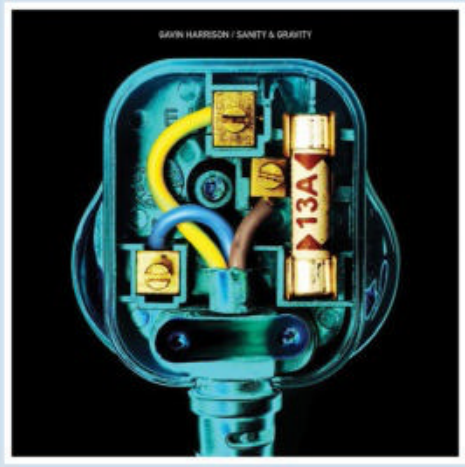
US trio **Moon X** offer up "jazz/prog-space rock with an experimental twist" on their debut album *Zap!* (davenewhouse.bandcamp.com). Featuring The Muffins' Dave Newhouse (woodwinds, flute, keys and vocals), his son George on drums and Jerry King on guitar, this elite unit turn their hand to bonkers psych, Canterbury and crunchy, ersatz Mahavishnu/free-jazz Miles tones too. Some gonzo spoken-word bits lighten a dish that'll be a bit rich for some palettes, but is served up by clearly seasoned hands.

Finally this time, **Isle Of Joy** is led by Finnish artist Sam Fröjdö, a drummer, composer, multi-instrumentalist and singer, and probably in that order going on his debut album, *Songs From The Second Floor* (Jonas Franck Productions). A fan of Zappa, Steely Dan and Pink Floyd, Fröjdö populates his big-hearted tunes with Moogs, electric pianos, saxophones and detailed drumwork: a little Rush here; a little Supertramp there. His own vocals are characterful but take a little getting used to: he's Nick Cave fronting Floyd on *My Sorrow's Great Embrace*; a randy Billy Joel on *One Night Stand*, while Charlotta Kerbs steals the show with her big-lunged vocal on gospel/bluesy *My Last Song*. All a bit nutty and eccentric, but worth a stream.

GAVIN HARRISON

Sanity & Gravity: 25th Anniversary Remaster KSCOPE

Superstar drummer's solo debut gets its time in the spotlight.



Prior to the release of his debut solo album in 1997, Gavin Harrison had been an in-demand session player for over a decade. Adopting an experimental and exploratory approach to both the compositions and his drums, *Sanity & Gravity* saw Harrison joined by some of the musicians he'd worked with, including Jakko Jakszyk, Mick Karn and both Richard Barbieri and Dave Stewart on additional keyboards.

> **This isn't an album of drum solos and self-aggrandisement.**

Sitting squarely in jazz-fusion territory with a pinch of African and South American influences, this isn't an album of drum solos and self-aggrandising showmanship. There are definite tunes, melodies and rhythms, yet these are framed in ways that explore textures, sounds and space; that toy with accents and emphasis; that present us with a mixture of the oddest of odd-time signatures, inscrutable syncopation and/or no over-arching limiting form at all.

Aim has possibly the longest section of traditional drum groove playing here, during the section where the band first kick in, which could have been lifted from any of Bruford's (the band) three late 70s albums. On one level it's playful yet highly sophisticated jazz-funk, yet it takes a few unexpected twists and turns showcasing Harrison's almost supernatural ability with metric modulations and beat displacement.

Harrison's creative process for the album partly involved him recording "squiggles" at the drums for minutes at a time, on top of which keyboard player and main collaborator Gary Sanctuary would compose, resulting in tracks like *On A Wave Of Positivity*. Featuring a distinctly Latin-infused languid melody, the moves into sections that feel as if the music might fall apart at any moment but never does. On bass, Mick Karn does some truly outstanding work — on *Dog Day*, he's bubbling, popping and sliding all over the place on a tune developed from an improvised jam, while his sensitive bass lines *Witness (For Bobby)* act as mellifluous glue to the subtle layers intertwining around him.

Despite being Harrison's album, it's not all about him, as evinced by *Sonata In H*, a beautiful, elegiac piano-based tune with Harrison's playing a gloriously eccentric minimum. Dave Stewart also receives a major spotlight in *Big News For A Small Day* where the drums and his piano weave in and out of each other beguilingly.

Long unavailable on physical media, this 25th anniversary edition has been remastered, given new artwork and includes a bonus track, *Iron Horse* — a slice of bright mid-paced funkiness. It's an album of considered, involving, intriguing and virtuosic music, often delivered in unexpected ways.

GARY MACKENZIE

BLOSSOM TOES

If Only For A Moment ESOTERIC

Standing on the tipping point between psych and prog.

Blossom Toes are a band that by all rights should have vanished into the mists of time. They released just two albums, *We Are Ever So Clean* in 1967, and *If Only For A Moment* two years later. They were signed to Marmalade, the label founded by Yardbirds manager Giorgio Gomelsky, but fortune failed to smile on Blossom Toes. Neither of their albums troubled the charts, although *We Are Ever So Clean* has since been re-evaluated and embraced as a highlight of British 60s psychedelia. This three-disc set aims to make a similar case for the follow-up.

If Only For A Moment found the band taking their sound in a heavier direction. *Peace Loving Man* has a menacing riff not dissimilar to Black Sabbath's *Iron Man*, which it predates, and a suitably intense vocal from bassist Brian Belshaw. The writing team of Belshaw and singer/guitarist Jim Cregan was not afraid to push musical boundaries. There's proto-prog in the shifting moods of *Kiss Of Confusion* or the changing meters of *Listen To The Silence*, while the twin guitar harmonies of *Indian Summer* are a precursor to Wishbone Ash and 70s hard rock.

The original eight songs on *If Only...* are bolstered by four bonus tracks, although *Postcard* and *Everyone's Leaving Me Now* hark back to the psychedelic pop of the first album, even as they're catchy and playful. The second disc contains live performances from two Belgian festival appearances, but the sound quality is awful, with too much treble, no low-end, and a lot of unintended distortion. The presence of Frank Zappa on the three-part *Grooving* will probably appeal to collectors, but it's an aimless, noodling jam session.

The third disc of demos and rarities is only mildly more diverting. *Poli's Folly* is a 10-minute vibraphone improvisation from drummer Poli Palmer, and *Marmalade Jam* is another bout of unstructured noodling. *If Only For A Moment* is a great, overlooked album, but the other two discs are drawn from distinctly slim pickings. **DW**

ELIAS HULK

Unchained ESOTERIC

Lone album from long forgotten early 70s monsters of prog.

The sleeve for Elias Hulk's first and only album depicts a crudely drawn monster that looks suspiciously like a certain green-skinned Marvel Comics superhero looming over a pair of naked and bound-up women. But the music on *Unchained* rises above the dumb, proto-metal imagery with its complex arrangements, diverse styles and virtuoso flights of musical fancy.

Obscure even at the time, the five-piece formed in Bournemouth in 1968. They gained a following on the UK underground before signing with independent label Young Blood, eventually releasing *Unchained* in 1970.

Most of the album's eight tracks follow a heavy prog blueprint that sees Pete Thorp laying a vocal theme over a central riff before the band leave the launchpad to their superior chops, solo or in unison, against unusual time signatures. Neil Tatum brandishes west coast psychedelic influences on *We Can Fly* before Bernard James takes a drum solo and Jim Haines' tree-trunk bass is always up in the mix, grunting warthog-style on *Anthology Of Dreams*. Hulk could have fallen victim to style-hopping dilettantism as tracks pinball between *Nightmare*'s Sabbath-like lumbering (albeit pumped with pin-sharp synchronised block chords) and light Latin jazz flavours of *Been Around Too Long*, or *Free*'s Fleetwood Mac black magic hoodoo followed by Coltrane-inspired raga rock on *Delhi Blues* yet they manage to retain command throughout.

Although attracting good reviews at the time, *Unchained* made little impact in the UK, unlike in Germany, where Elias Hulk built up an enthusiastic audience, which accounted for most of their sales. The band split in 1971, and their lone LP became a much-sought after artefact that inevitably skyrocketed in value. Initially reissued in 2007 when bassist Jim Haines and drummer Bernard James unexpectedly revived Elias Hulk, this latest iteration has been remastered (albeit with no additional extras), revealing it once again as a properly interesting prog curio. **KN**

FIELDS

Feeling Free: The Complete Recordings (1971-73) ESOTERIC

Two studio albums and extras from early 70s prog supergroup of sorts.

The Field in question is keyboard player Graham Field, ex-of Rare Bird, a group who had a worldwide hit single with *Sympathy* in 1969, but then split to escape a punitive management contract. Field wanted to put a new band together and, as recommended by Robert Fripp, he recruited Andy McCulloch, who had just drummed on King Crimson's *Lizard*. Alan Barry on bass, lead guitar and vocals, made up the trio.

On their self-titled debut, released in 1971, they race out of the blocks on A *Friend Of Mine*. Field's Hammond organ playing reflected the drive of Graham Bond embellished with some cheeky Emerson-like classical quotations. He was also stylistically close to Dave Greenslade, who was influenced by R&B and Bach, and a subtle jazziness about Fields' music is reminiscent of Colosseum.

Field's speedy, freewheeling keyboard lines are closely tracked by McCullough's drumming, who resisted the overplaying that marked his time with Crimson. But his crisp rhythms are punctuated by finely articulated breaks at astonishing speed. It's a diverse set with the medieval stylings of *Three Minstrels*, and Pachelbel's *Canon In D Major* making a flimsily disguised appearance on *The Eagle*.

Barry left for the second album on which Frank Farell sings and plays bass, guitar and violin. *Wonder Why* features uncredited female backing vocals, with Field cutting loose on synth, while he goes into overdrive on organ on *Let Her Sleep*, which sounds like a cross between Egg and The Nice.

Due to management changes, CBS pulled the plug towards the end of those sessions, thus killing off the band. The unreleased second album finally saw the light of day in 2015 on Esoteric as *Contrasts: Urban Roar To Country Peace*, with outtakes – to which a couple of Sounds Of The 70s session tracks have now been added.

Fields were short-lived and easily missed at the time, but they were so good, one can only wonder what they might have achieved had fate been kinder to them. **MB**

GANDALF'S FIST

Decennium GANDALFSFIST.COM

Prog traditionalists look back over their first 10 years.

Gandalf's Fist prime movers Dean Marsh and Luke Severn celebrate the 10-year anniversary of their band's first album with this compilation of remastered tracks that spans their career to date. The pair have stated *Decennium* is not intended to be a 'Greatest Hits', but rather to capture the feel and flow of a concert setlist.

The album opens with *Shadowborn*, from 2016's *The Clockwork Fable*, which does a fine job of setting out their stall. With a clear penchant for concept albums and sagas, the music favours a steady, careful mid-tempo range that allows the vocalists to get all the story beats across and lyrically speaking, Gandalf's Fist are nothing if not verbose. There's everything here from a reinterpretation of *The Wizard Of Oz* to science fiction, fantasy and steampunk.

Victims Of The Light adds a little folk to their neo-prog, and it wouldn't be a proper folk tale if it didn't begin with the words, '*Come gather round...*'. *Into The Dark* feels like they're going for a *Dark Side Of The Moon* vibe, with the Gilmour-esque vocals and slightly downbeat mood, although the dual guitar harmonies are more in keeping with Thin Lizzy than Pink Floyd.

There's a new recording of *Monolith* from the forthcoming special edition of 2012's *From A Point Of Existence*, although that's one of the weaker entries here. Marsh's vocals sound like his pushing at his limits with a slightly shrill performance that doesn't sit comfortably in the mix. Stronger is Keri Farish's delivery of *The Clokkemaker*, although there's that mid-tempo again, and the Dickensian melancholy of 2017's gloomy Christmas song *Winter's Mourning*.

The final and oldest track is *The Master And The Monkey Part 1*, from GF's debut album in 2011. Severn and Marsh have been critical of their own production on this one, but the remaster lends it some welly, fattening up the low-end and the drums. It's that attention to detail in brushing up the back catalogue that should draw the faithful to *Decennium*. **DW**

SPIRIT

Twelve Dreams Of Dr Sardonicus ESOTERIC

Randy California and co's masterpiece remastered and expanded.

Less than three years after leading the charge for US prog with the trailblazing eclecticism of their self-titled 1968 debut album, Spirit were starting to implode. The rock elements brought by singer Jay Ferguson and bassist Mark Andes that had previously coalesced so magnificently with veteran drummer Ed Cassidy and keyboardist John Locke's jazz backgrounds had begin to create a creative schism within the band. Singer-guitarist Randy California

The definitive incarnation of their greatest album.

was wrestling with his own mental problems exacerbated by both his LSD use and head injuries suffered from falling off his horse.

Yet somehow, the band still found it within themselves to serve up a brilliant album with *Twelve Dreams Of Dr Sardonicus*, transforming themselves into a dynamic, socially conscious band with help from produced David Briggs (as recommended by Neil Young). Despite his fevered head, California's songwriting blossomed with complex psychedelic power, offering early climate warnings on *Nature's Way*, *Animal Zoo* and *Nothin' To Hide*. Named after Cassidy's bald pate, *Mr Skin* gave early Genesis a riff template, while *Space Child* finds Locke using a Moog for sci-fi jazz themes.

After a damning slagging off in *Rolling Stone* stalled sales in the US (although it made No.28 in the UK), *Dr Sardonicus*' towering resonance wouldn't be recognised for years. It's been reissued before but has never sounded so good as on this version, the climax of Esoteric's comprehensive Spirit reissue programme. Archivist and custodian Mick Skidmore has outdone himself with fresh remastering, 11 bonus tracks (six previously unreleased) and a forensically boosted bonus disc recorded at San Francisco's Fillmore West in May 1970.

Unheard items include several from Jay Ferguson's vault, including live backing tracks for *When I Touch You*, *Love Has Found A Way*, *Street Worm* (featuring a jaw-droppingly ferocious solo from California) and slow-burning outtake *Dirty Dan* (plus newly discovered ballad *Walking On My Feet*). Familiar tracks include mono single *Animal Zoo* and Red *Light Roll On*, post-album *Rougher Road* and Randy's maiden May 1970 Fillmore West performance of *Nature's Way*.

Buffed up and micro-edited, the live set rocks up catalogue faves and *Sardonicus* tracks as works in progress, joined by unrecorded curios *I'm Truckin'* and *Jealous*. "We knew we had something special, but we didn't know how good it was until it was gone," the late John Locke is quoted as saying in the accompanying liner notes, with great understatement. The evidence is all here in this definitive incarnation of this magic band's greatest album.

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GROUNDHOGS

Road Hogs: Live From Richmond To Pocono FIRE

It's blues, Jim, but not as we know it.

The discovery of a set of live tapes capturing The Groundhogs on the cusp of change at two different points in their career provides a gripping narrative of how transformative the progressive movement was in the music scene of the late 1960s.

The first set, caught live at Richmond Athletic Ground in south London in 1969 just after their second album, *Blues Obituary,* had been released, shows a band clearly chomping at the bit to put the blues behind them as they open with *Cherry Red*, a song that linchpin guitarist Tony McPhee tells the audience is so new it doesn't yet have a title. Hearing such an early version nearly two years before it would be recorded in the studio is a real treat.

The sound quality on the Richmond disc may be grainy but the sheer power punches through the murk. On *No More Doggin'* McPhee's habit of radically detuning the strings in the middle of the song doesn't so much sound like someone playing the blues as dive-bombing it from a great height. More than half a century on it remains a bracing and dangerous sound.

The sonic quality on the four tracks recorded at Pennsylvania's Pocono festival in 1972 is much improved. Appearing in the middle of a larger bill as they tried to break into the American market, there's no sense of a band pulling any punches or toning things down. With his quivering bottleneck strafing the length of the fretboard, his extended, angular soloing is more akin to an experimental sound sculpture than belting out tame rock licks.

Frequently swaying between the contrasting poles of near silence and ear-splitting noise, McPhee's brinkmanship is equaled by Pete Cruikshank's assertive bass and Ken Pustelnik's surging drums. Pustelnik would depart soon after, replaced by Egg's Clive Brooks. However, this set, now featuring numbers from *Thank Christ For The Bomb*, *Split*, and *Who Will Save The World* brilliantly highlights the trio in all their unpredictable, ragged-edged glory. **SS**

ORPHANED LAND

30 Years Of Oriental Metal CENTURY MEDIA

The life and times of Israel's prog metal peacemakers.

Not just the one of the first bands from the Middle East to have any impact elsewhere, but a consistent force for the greater good, Orphaned Land have repeatedly broken down barriers while espousing an uplifting message of hope. If their music was rubbish, fans of forward-thinking creativity would still owe them a debt of gratitude, but as *30 Years Of Oriental Metal* confirms, the Israelis' vision has informed some of the most inventive and progressive records in recent memory.

This lavish box set comprises all six of the band's studio albums, with a generous helping of rare and unheard bonus material, and may be many latter-day converts' first chance to hear the band's early works. Originally released in 1994, debut album *Sahara* heralded the arrival of Orphaned Land's self-described "oriental metal": with lyrics sung in English, Hebrew and Arabic and flurries of Middle Eastern atmospherics, it showcased a deliciously alien re-imagining of modern heaviness. 1996's *El Norra Alila* repeated the trick, but it was the band's third album that sealed the deal. A sprawling concept piece with the widescreen sweep of a movie soundtrack, *Mabool: The Story Of The Three Sons Of Seven* still sounds extraordinary. Steven Wilson loved it, too, and ended up mixing the follow-up, *The Never Ending Way Of ORwarriOR*, which was somehow even more ambitious and immersive. It received the kind of ecstatic reviews that most bands would kill for, and Orphaned Land's long overdue breakthrough was in the bag. No wonder, then, that 2013's bombastic and theatrical *All Is One* sounded so celebratory and its core message so crystal clear. Finally, 2018's *Unsung Prophets And Dead Messiahs* encapsulates everything that went before, but with a renewed sense of urgency and some of the band's most memorable songs, not least towering centrepiece *Chains Fall To Gravity*. Collected in one place, it feels more than merely momentous – it's proof that music really can change the world. **DL**

TAME IMPALA

The Slow Rush FICTION

Kevin Parker's deluxe masterpiece made even more deluxe.

Kevin Parker's footprint on popular music of the past decade is fairly sizeable. The Tame Impala linchpin has journeyed from the dense, galactic wig outs of Perth's psych rock scene to being the go-to 'rock' guy for the likes of Kanye West and Lady Gaga.

Parker is an old-school studio maverick in many ways, evoking the restless, curious minds of Mike Oldfield and Todd Rundgren (who remixed Tame Impala's *Elephant* in 2012). And like them, he's looking not just to dabble in, but master various genres of music. Hence 2020's *The Slow Rush*, Parker's attempt to find a connection between 60s psych rock, psychedelia and cosmic electronic music.

> **Prog is in its DNA - it's evident in the song structures.**

Many of Tame Impala's older fans thought it was a step too far. Superficially, it sounded like music for futuristic dancefloors — space-age disco with no sharp edges at all. There was certainly a huge gulf between it and Tame Impala's psych-centric debut *Innerspeaker* or 2012's *Lonerism*.

But, as Parker has noted, prog is in its DNA. It's evident in the song structures — opener *One More Year*, for example, is not really pop at all as it meanders and shifts over its six minutes. Elsewhere, *It Might Be Time* opens like a lost Supertramp single. Parker plays his "dorky, white disco-funk" throughout; there is rigour in its repetition and wave upon wave of keyboards (if there's a criticism, it's that a lack of grit in the oyster tends towards a homogeny at times).

Lyrically, *The Slow Rush* ruminates on the passage of time, reflects on growing older and highlights emotions around bereavement. Parker is unafraid to stray into raw feelings and their potential for attendant awkwardness. When he mourns his father on *Posthumous Forgiveness* with lyrics such as: *'The time that I had Mick Jagger on the phone — I thought of you when we spoke'* his sincerity alleviates any gaucheness.

Here, in an expanded box set — remixes, transparent red vinyl, alternate artwork, booklet and 2050 calendar — its cosmic cruiser yacht rock has a distinctly progressive feel in its sound washes and intent. And if Parker's cross-genre tendencies are not apparent already, the set's eight bonus tracks include remixes from electronic wizard Four Tet, indie R&B star Blood Orange and rapper Lil Yachty.

None of this will bring back those fans gave up on Tame Impala around 2015's pop-leaning *Currents*. But there's a spirit of adventure to *The Slow Rush* that goes back to Parker's prog/psych roots — and if the album doesn't offer the same immersive listen something like *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, then nothing does. Like many of the great albums, it will reveal its secrets to the patient and the open-minded.

DARYL EASLEA

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GONG

Live At The Gong Family Unconventional Gathering A-WAVE

The onstage alchemy of classic Gong's final show revisited.

On 5 November 2006, Gong's classic line-up played together for the first time in 31 years at the Melkweg club, Amsterdam – it was also the last time. To coincide with the CD release of this historic event, the DVD of the concert has been reissued. As well as being a visual celebration of this unique and sometimes confounding band, it's actually an ideal way into the Gong universe for anybody who may have previously found their appeal elusive.

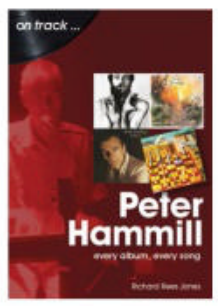
Essentially a 'greatest hits' collection based around *Camembert Electrique* and the *Radio Gnome Invisible* trilogy, the playing throughout is exemplary – but it's seeing these songs performed live that really helps to make sense of the band's cosmic prog/jazz theatre. It's inevitably band leader Daevid Allen who grabs the attention, winningly down to earth while clearly on a completely different wavelength to the rest of us, his outfits progressing from cyberpunk guru to pothead Pierrot to mystic sex wizard.

The action is excellently shot, with occasional overlaid visual effects ranging from charmingly naff to surprisingly effective. A brilliant document that captures the surreal magic of Gong. **JB**

PETER HAMMILL: EVERY ALBUM, EVERY SONG

Richard Rees Jones SONICBOND PUBLISHING

In-depth exploration of VdGG leader's solo work.



Unlike other subjects in the well-regarded 'On Track' series whose careers ended sometime in the 70s, Peter Hammill's is very much ongoing, an artist who simply – and thankfully – cannot stop working. Complementing Dan Coffey's similar book on Van der Graaf Generator, Richard Rees Jones makes it clear in his introduction that he got into Hammill's solo work in the late 80s before even hearing VdGG, and through the track-by-track examination aims to explore "Hammill's lifelong preoccupations – reason, memory, the unravelling of time and the choices we make." Fortunately Hammill has never been reticent to discuss his work, and Rees Jones uses the musician's newsletter/website explanations and sleevenotes sparingly throughout to illustrate his arguments.

The author's take on *Sleep Now* from *And Close As This* is telling. He writes: "The song has an almost unbearable tenderness at its heart, a vulnerability inscribed in the gentle turns of its melody and in exquisite lines." Rees Jones has the appropriate maturity to capture an artist who writes so directly from the heart. Hammill remains impenetrable to many, but this will illuminate some of the dense terrain that is his solo work. **DE**

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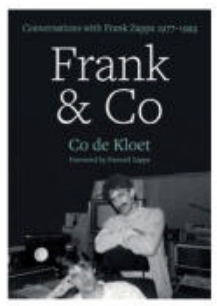
Co de Kloet JAWBONE PRESS

A personal account of meetings with a remarkable man.



Hearing an artist can have a life-changing impact on a teenager. In the case of Dutch broadcaster Co de Kloet, encountering Zappa's head-spinning music on record and in concert in 1973 when he was aged 14 was one such moment. Just four years later, via his connections in Dutch radio, de Kloet secured his first interview with the man himself, marking the beginning of a professional and personal association that endured until the composer's death in 1993.

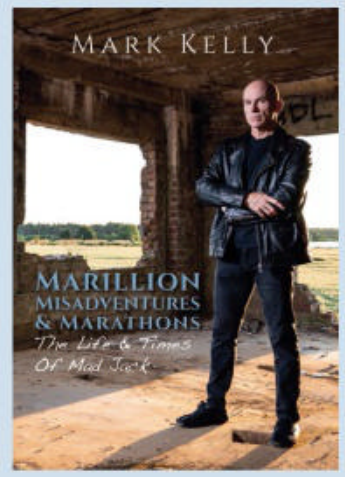
In this brisk and unfussy account of catching Zappa in Europe or visiting him at work and at home in the States, the author's narrative of Zappa's many creative achievements is interspersed with personal anecdotes and interview transcripts not only with Zappa but several known associates from various in his career, including Jimmy Carl Black, George Duke, Don Van Vliet, and especially interesting exchanges with classical conductor Kent Nagano.

The chapter on the hoop-jumping gymnastics required when dealing with the Zappa Family Trust for a new staging of *200 Motels* in 2000 shows that you should sometimes be careful what you wish for when it comes to working with one's heroes or, in this case, their estate. **SS**

MARK KELLY

Marillion, Misadventures & Marathons: The Life & Times Of Mad Jack KINGMAKER PUBLISHING

A keyboardist's-eye-view of prog icons' rollercoaster career.



Mark Kelly pulls no punches in this revealing autobiography, in which the Marillion keyboard player charts his band's rise, fall and rise again in a fashion best described as unflinching. The book falls into roughly two halves, the first dealing with Kelly's childhood and the Fish years, when it was all very rock'n'roll and turmoil seemed to be Marillion's modus operandi, much of that apparently due to their Scottish frontman.

> **There's poignancy, self-reflection and even self-flagellation.**

Fish emerges as a madcap one-man whirlwind of trouble, possessing an insatiable appetite for drink and drugs combined with a formidable constitution and a domineering personality. The delight that Fish takes in firing band members smacks of a cruel streak, although Kelly is hardly flattering about some of them himself. "His timekeeping was about as reliable as a pub-bought Rolex," he writes about founding drummer Mick Pointer.

Following the arrival of Steve Hogarth, there's a noticeable shift in the dynamics. Where the battles seemed to be overwhelmingly internal while Fish was on board, thereafter Marillion's struggles become a series of tussles against record labels, management deals, and the constant fear of slipping into irrelevance. It might be a music industry cliché, but it's still startling to realise how gluttonously labels and management enrich themselves at the expense of artists.

Kelly documents Marillion's pioneering ventures in crowdfunding, which could easily have made for a very dry read. Fortunately, he punctuates every anecdote with a barbed sense of humour, and the ups and downs of the band's fortunes are given a very human dimension by Kelly's candid accounts of his turbulent personal life. As cutting as he can be about former bandmates, he doesn't spare himself when it comes to his shortcomings as a husband and father, which lends a sense of poignancy and self-reflection, perhaps even self-flagellation, to the biography.

On the lighter side, the book provides a detailed insight into the making of every Marillion album, charting the evolution of the band's creative process in considerable depth, although cataloguing who wrote what verse in each song may only appeal to the most devoted fans. Kelly is fulsome with praise for the abilities of Hogarth, Mosley, Rothery and Trewavas, but has no airs or graces about his own talents. "Some might say I'm playing in the wrong key," he writes, "I'm here to tell you that those people are Communists and liars!" An immensely enjoyable and entertaining romp through 40-plus years of prog history.

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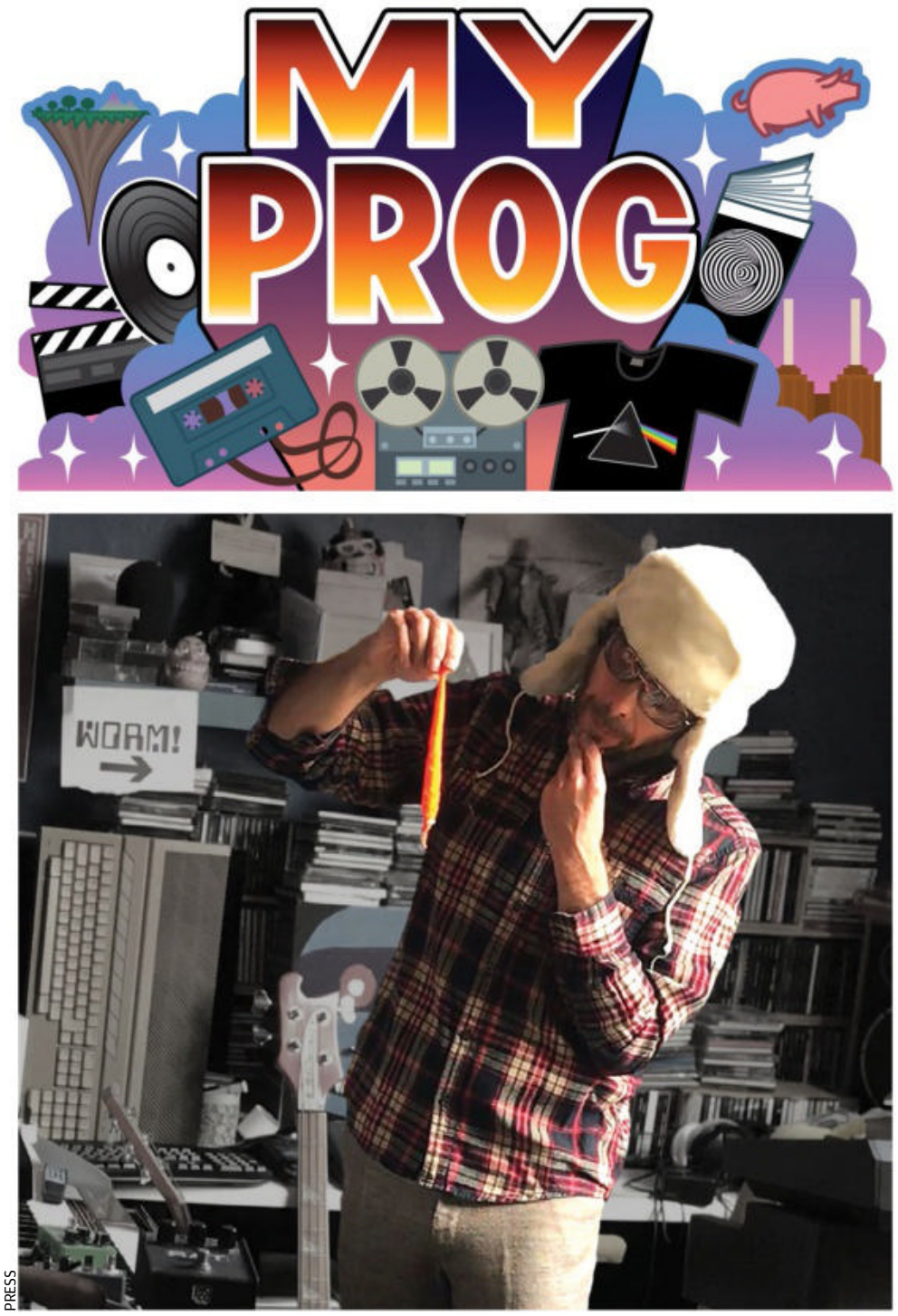


JARROD GOSLING

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

Where's home?
Sheffield! The Only Way Is S6…

Earliest prog memory?
My dad had loads and loads of cassettes: Genesis' *Trick Of The Tail*, Pink Floyd's *Relics*, *Wish You Were Here*, and Yes' *Going For The One*. I played that one more than anything. I was about 10 — before that I'd been more interested in Lego and Action Man…

First prog album you bought?
Yesshows, on vinyl from Bradley's Records in Sheffield, about 1983. It had stuff I was familiar with and the older stuff too, and it wasn't too expensive for a double album.

And the last?
The self-titled album by a Yugoslavian band called Time, from 1972. I bought it today, on CD-quality download. I buy albums every two or three days.

First prog gig?
Marillion at Sheffield City Hall in 1983, on their Script For A Jester's Tear tour. Peter Hammill supporting, just him and his guitar.

And the latest?
Matt Berry at Manchester Academy about four years ago. Cecilia [Fage, Cobalt Chapel] is in his band. I'm not a very good gig goer though, I get tired and bored very easily…

Best prog gig you ever saw in your life?
I saw Air in Barcelona back when they were touring *10 000 Hz Legend*. They were doing something similar to [Gosling's other band] I Monster and, watching as a musician, I was in awe.

Thundercat: cutting edge.

ALLEN J. SCHABEN / LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

Latest prog discovery?
Thundercat — he does his own stuff, he's played with Suicidal Tendencies, Kamasi Washington. He's cutting edge.

What's your guilty musical pleasure?
My collection's a very mixed bag. I've got [Jim Dale's] *Meet Jim Dale* in there somewhere, but I don't listen to it much, honest…

What do you collect?
Crap 70s craft books, the ones you get from charity shops for 50p — knitting and crochet patterns, stuff like that. I cut them up and make collages. I just love the graphics and the fonts.

What would you specialist subject be on *Mastermind*?
British horror films from the 60s and 70s. Not Hammer — the more obscure ones, like *Corruption* from 1968. Peter Cushing's in it and it's bonkers!

Horror king Peter Cushing in *Corruption*.

COLUMBIA PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

> "Flying Lotus and Thundercat are more progressive than most prog bands."

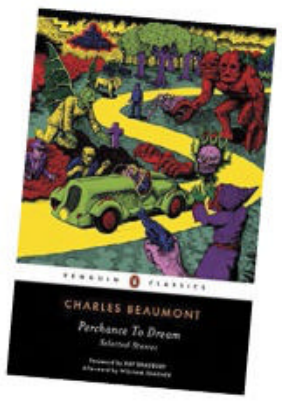
Favourite prog venue?
St Pancras Old Church, in London. It's still a proper church but a venue too, where we [Cobalt Chapel] did one of our early gigs. It's perfect. The Green Man Festival is fantastic too.

Your prog hero?
Robert Wyatt, and Todd Rundgren. They're two of the good guys, aren't they?

Outside of prog, what are you into?
I love being outside — I go running, which is great to unwind. I'm always doing my artwork, whether it's for myself or an album cover for Tim Bowness. And I do like beer.

Most important piece of prog music?
Introduzione by Il Balletto Di Bronzo, from their [1972] album *Ys*. Amazing track.

Recommend us a good read.
Perchance To Dream: Selected Stories by Charles Beaumont. He's probably most famous for his stories being used for episodes of *The Twilight Zone* and Alfred Hitchcock's shows.



Which prog muso would you most like to work with?
Flying Lotus. To me, he and Thundercat are more progressive than most prog bands these days.

Which proggy album gets you in a good mood?
Magma's *Bourges 1979* gets me going, especially the full version of *Mëkanïk Dëstruktïw Kömmandöh*.

Favourite prog album cover?
Nektar's *A Tab In The Ocean*.

What are you up to at the moment?
Regal Worm's *The Hideous Goblink* album is out now and there's another one on the way, called *Worm!*. This year, there'll be a Cobalt Chapel EP and hopefully some gigs, and an I Monster single [*The Living Dead*] is out now too.

See www.regalworm.bandcamp.com for more information.

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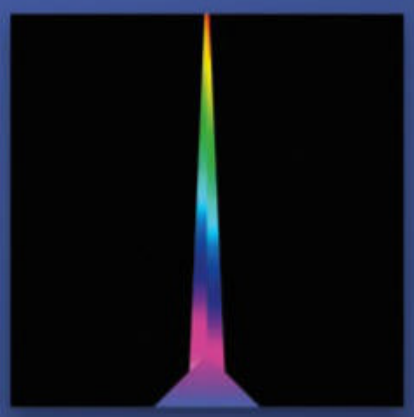

Mortality (Vinyl, CD & Digital)

The self-titled theme album debut from an all star jazz fusion lineup (feat. Verneri Pohjola, Aki Rissanen and others) has been hailed as a masterpiece of instrumental jazz-prog.

- Finnish Grammy nominee 2021 (best jazz album) -

"These eight tracks paint a vivid picture of what it means to be human" - Finnish Music Quarterly
"Mortality is about as good as music gets" - Exposé Magazine (USA)
"5/5 *****" -suomijazz.com, Colossus prog magazine, Nordiche Music (Germany) etc.

Ossi Maristo - Arc (Vinyl, CD & Digital)

Guitarist Ossi Maristo's debut album is a real tour-de-force of masterful guitar playing.

'ARC' is the perfect blend of instrumental prog rock and jazz fusion to anyone following international guitar heroes like Steve Morse, Guthrie Govan and Eric Johnson.

Aaro Laitinen Quintet - From 3 to 23 (CD & Digital)

Combining prog, modern jazz and electronic music Aaro Laitinen Quintet delivers a powerful debut with their pandemic-inspired instrumental theme album.

Jacques Daniels Project - Distance (CD & Digital)

Drawing influences ranging from Tom Waits to Toto Jacques Daniels Project, based in the arctic city of Rovaniemi, is modern pop-prog at its finest with a northern, Aurora Borealis tinged flair. Complete with brilliant and lush vocal harmonies to match Crosby, Still & Nash

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